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THE TRUE STORY

OF

HAMLET AND OPHELIA

THE TRUE STORY

OF

HAMLET AND OPHELIA

BY

FREDERICKA BEARDSLEY GILCHRIST

"And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about: so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on the inventors' heads: all this can I
Truly deliver"

BOSTON
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1889

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THE TRUE STORY

OF

HAMLET AND OPHELIA.

I.

IT is possible to form a conception of an intelligent, intellectual, educated man to whom the *Tragedy of Hamlet* is unknown, to whom the name *Hamlet* conveys no idea; and until a critic places himself in the condition of impartiality and lack of prejudice in which this imaginary man would be, he is not perfectly fitted to judge of Shakespeare's greatest play. The conceptions and misconceptions imposed on him by actors and commentators must warp his judgment and control his understanding.

It is asserted that *Hamlet* is a study for the closet, rather than a drama to be presented on the stage; and the authority for the assertion is the play itself, with its difficulties of stage interpretation. True it is, that our imaginary man, who had never heard of the *Tragedy*, would conclude that Booth's, or Barrett's, or Irving's, or Fechter's adaptation is not a coherent, self-explanatory dramatic work; its presentation would seem to him only a series of scarcely connected *tableaux vivants*, with fragments of descriptive dialogue. But none of these adaptations,

nor any other, is Shakespeare's play. In every adaptation Shakespeare's text is wofully cut, and Shakespeare's meaning, in that which is retained, is wofully misrepresented in the acting.

It will be conceded that a perfect dramatic work, while it may admit of and reward deep study, should not require it in order to be intelligible. It is not expected that an auditor will need to listen many times to the repetition of any play, before he can comprehend its meaning. Special passages are not repeated, and special metaphysical questions are not weighed, during the representation of a drama. The lines as spoken by the actors—spoken once—should be all that is required to acquaint a hearer with every thing it concerns him to know of the fortunes or misfortunes of the *dramatis personæ*. It seems to me that in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, properly interpreted, this information is furnished to the audience; but many years of misrepresentation have unfortunately overlaid the story with the actors' and commentators' veneer, and the student who now desires to make an impartial study of *Hamlet*, and to discover what this information really is, must, as I said before, first place himself, so far as possible, in the condition of the imaginary man who has never heard of the play. He must discharge his mind of all ideas concerning it; he must be ready to believe that Shakespeare's text contains all the material needed to make the play intelligible, and he must seek for the meaning of the text, without considering what this or that commentator thinks about it. At the same time he must remember that the play-

goers of Shakespeare's day probably comprehended the drama perfectly; for they possessed a help to its understanding which we have not—the actors who played it knew what Shakespeare meant them to portray. This the modern student must discover for himself, remembering always that the text, unless it has been hopelessly distorted, is subject to the same interpretation now as then.

We have reason to believe that this play was understood as well as loved by those who heard it during its author's lifetime and for many years after. Its publication at least four times before Shakespeare's death—four times in eight years—indicates that the tragedy was popular; and we know that it was republished, time after time, in essentially the same words in which it has come down to us. If these words, in the judgment of the playgoers of Shakespeare's day, had hopelessly involved the story, is it not probable that its author would have been appealed to, to make his meaning clear? Would not some edition contain explanatory alterations? No such edition has been discovered; even the Folio of 1623, which leaves out of *Hamlet* many lines found in earlier editions, does not, in its few new passages, cast any light on the alleged obscurities of the play.

To make an intelligent, independent study of *Hamlet* now, there is needed, in addition to a modern edition of *Hamlet*, copies of the *First* and *Second Quartos*, of the *First Folio*, and of *The Hystorie of Hamblet;* these, I think, may be considered original documents. The *Hamlet* of to-day is not a

copy of any one of these originals, but is a combination of them all.

A few words about these earliest known editions may help the student who has not books of reference at hand. It is not determined when the play was written, or when it was first acted. A play of *Hamlet* was acted on the ninth of June, 1594, by the company to which Shakespeare belonged, and that this was an old drama is judged from the small sum received for its performance; besides, there are several allusions in contemporary literature which fix the date of a play of *Hamlet* as precedent to 1594. In 1602 there is entered in the Stationers' Registers: "A booke called *the Revenge of Hamlett*, etc.;" but the earliest edition of our play of *Hamlet* that has been discovered was published in 1603. In this the arrangement of the scenes differs from the present order, and a scene—given in it—between the queen and Horatio, is omitted from the later editions. The characters are the same, but Polonius is called Corambis; Laertes, Leartes; and Reynaldo, Montano. This edition is called by commentators the First Quarto, or $Q._1$ But two copies of this edition have been discovered, the first not until 1823: this edition, therefore, was not known to the earlier commentators. The first copy found lacks the last page, and the second copy, discovered in 1856, lacks the title-page; each, therefore, completes the other. The First Quarto bears the name of Shakespeare on the title-page, but opinions differ as to whether it is entirely his work, or a revision by him of the older play existing before 1594. It

is supposed that the publication of the First Quarto was not authorized, and it is thought possible that the lines were written out, by some actor, from memory.

In 1604 a second version of *Hamlet* was published, which is known as the Second Quarto,—Q.,. This purports to be "The Tragicall Historie of H A M L E T, *Prince of Denmarke*, By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie," and it is accepted by critics as Shakespeare's work. Of this edition only three copies have been preserved. Furness says that the First Quarto contains only 2143 lines, and the Second Quarto about 3719. *Hamlet* was reprinted at least twice more during Shakespeare's lifetime; and these editions do not differ, in any material point, from the edition of 1604. Reprints of all the early editions have been made, which are known as the Ashbee-Halliwell Reprints.

The first edition of Shakespeare's collected plays was issued by Heminge and Condell, his friends and fellow-actors, in 1623, the seventh year after his death. The *Hamlet* in this edition is known as the *First Folio* (F.,) *Hamlet*. It omits some passages found in the Quartos, and inserts others that they do not contain. It is from the First and the Second Quartos, and from the First Folio, that the modern *Hamlet* has been compiled; these three—the First Quarto, the Second Quarto, and the First Folio—are the only early editions that are needed by a student who does not aim to be a critic,

and copies of these can be procured with little trouble.

The Duke of Devonshire bought one of the copies of the First Quarto and one of the copies of the Second Quarto: these two Quartos were, in 1860, reprinted with scrupulous exactness by Josiah Allen, Jr., under the supervision of Samuel Timmins. "The two texts [are] printed on opposite pages, and so arranged that the parallel passages face each other." This reprint is variously known as "The Devonshire Hamlets," "Timmins's Reprint," or "Allen's Reprint."

From the First Folio several Reprints of *Hamlet* have been made. Among these are Stratmann's Reprint of Hamlet from the First Folio, collated with all the editions up to 1637 (in this, however, there are many errors); and Ludlow's Reprint.

But I think there is still another authority that the impartial student must consult. He must examine the raw material from part of which Shakespeare elaborated the play.

The Hystorie of Hamblet is the story on which the play of *Hamlet* is founded. The first known English publication of the *Hystorie* was made in 1608, four years after the publication of the Second Quarto. The story, derived, as is supposed, from an old Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, was earlier translated into French: this French translation appeared in 1570. For reasons that seem plausible, Shakespearean scholars believe that the translation into English was not made until after the play of *Hamlet* appeared, but they go further than

this, and say that Shakespeare never read the novel. If this were so, we should not need to consider its influence on the play.

The Hamblet whom Belleforest, the French translator, depicts in the *Hystorie*, was a youth not fully grown, who pretended to be mad in order to preserve his life until he should be old enough to kill the uncle who had murdered his father and debauched his mother,—until he should be old enough to justify his conduct to the Danes. This youth was patient, self-controlling, conscientious, absolutely truthful, faithful in friendship, intellectually active, and philosophical, but melancholy, believing in the supernatural to the extent of thinking that the devil has power to inform mankind of things past.

We readily perceive that these are the characteristics that Shakespeare's young prince displays, and we shall be forced to admit that Shakespeare took Hamblet exactly as he found him, and carried him from the sixth century to the seventeenth, modifying only the manifestations of his pretended madness to make them pleasing to the age in which he placed him. We must also allow that he represented all the other personages whom he took from the *Hystorie* exactly as they are represented there,—that is, as to their characters and possibilities of action.

In the preface to *Rienzi* Bulwer says, "Nay, even in the more imaginative plays, which he [Shakespeare] has founded on novels and legends popular in his time, it is curious and instructive to see how

little he has altered the original groundwork,—taking for granted the main materials for the story, and reserving all his matchless resources of wisdom and invention to illustrate from mental analysis the creations whose outlines he was content to borrow. He receives as a literal fact, not to be altered, the somewhat incredible assertion of the novelist, that the pure and delicate and high-born Venetian loves the swarthy Moor,—and that Romeo, fresh from his woes for Rosaline, becomes suddenly enamoured of Juliet: he found the Improbable and employed his art to make it truthful."

Shakespeare found the Improbable in the first chapters of the *Hystorie of Hamblet*, but what he found he seems to have preserved. All the characters of the play, except Laertes and Fortinbras, are found in the old *Hystorie*, some only suggested, it is true; but, like a modern naturalist, who from a fossil bone or tooth can reconstruct an extinct animal, so Shakespeare, from a hint, a line, could re-create a character and divine all its thoughts and actions. Shakespeare took the old novel and preserved it as it was, except the end, which he reconstructed. He amplified the story and changed it from narrative to dialogue, and this is the reason so few of the literal expressions of the *Hystorie* are found in the play. This, however, is not a reason assigned by Shakespearean scholars, the majority of whom, while they admit that the play of *Hamlet* is founded on the *Hystorie of Hamblet*, assert that Shakespeare never saw the novel, but that his knowledge of the story came only from the old play, which they

believe Shakespeare re-wrote and transmuted from base metal into gold. They think the *Hystorie* of very little importance, valuing it only because it furnished the motive for the first play. On this subject—the debt Shakespeare owes to the *Hystorie*—Furness says, "the curious student with the Reprint [of the *Hystorie*] at hand, can misspend what time he pleases, and make his own conclusions."

Whether Shakespeare was, or was not, familiar with the novel, it is admitted that on it the first play was founded; if he did not get his material directly from the story, he got it at second-hand from the play: but why may he not have seen the French translation that appeared in 1570, or even an earlier translation into English from Saxo Grammaticus? It appears that only one copy of the *Hystorie* of 1608 has been preserved. This was owned by Collier, who reprinted it in 1842 in the first volume of his *Shakespeare's Library*. No copy of an earlier edition has been discovered, but it is believed that others may have been published.

Careful consideration must surely cause the student to feel that the influence of the *Hystorie* has been very much underrated; for study and comparison make it almost certain that Shakespeare had it before him, in some form, when he arranged the Quarto of 1604.

Observe the genesis of one passage: In the *Hystorie*, p. 308, we find these lines:

> Hamlet, while his father liued had been instructed in that deuilish art, whereby the wicked spirite abuseth mankind, and

aduertiseth him (as he can) of things past. It toucheth not the matter herein to discouer the parts of deuination in man, and whether this prince, by reason of his ouer great melancholy, had received those impressions, etc.

In the Quarto of 1603 the passage derived from these lines is:

> This ſpirit that I haue ſeene may be the Diuell,
> And out of my weakeneſſe and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with ſuch men,
> Doth ſeeke to damne me.

In the Quarto of 1604 it is:

> The ſpirit that I have ſeene
> May be a deale, and the deale hath power
> T'aſſume a pleaſing ſhape, yea, and perhaps,
> Out of my weakenes, and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with ſuch ſpirits,
> Abuſes me to damne me.

The use of the word "abuses"—of which the French is *abuser*—in the Quarto of 1604, indicates either that Shakespeare had the *Hystorie* before him when he wrote, or that the older play, if there were one, presented the word in a paraphrase of this passage. Probably the former was the case. A passage that confirms this belief is found only in the Quarto of 1604; there is nothing corresponding to it in the earlier Quarto. The lines are these:

> let it worke,
> For tis the ſport to haue the enginer
> Hoiſt with his owne petar, an't ſhall goe hard
> But I will delue one yard belowe their mines,
> And blowe them at the Moone.

The germ of this passage is on p. 305 of the *Hystorie*, and in the same relative position as in the

play,—namely, at the end of Hamlet's exhortation to his mother. It reads:

> I shall not dye, without reuenging my selfe vpon mine enemie, and that himselfe shall be the instrument of his owne decay, and to execute that which of my selfe I durst not haue enterprised.

There are many other passages, several of which are designated later, that point directly to the *Hystorie* as the source of the Quarto of 1604. Every sentiment expressed by Hamblet to his mother in the *Hystorie*, Shakespeare has transferred to his Hamlet, although, in the play, not all of them are addressed to Gertrude. I believe that an acquaintance with the old *Hystorie* is a great and necessary aid to a thorough comprehension of the play (since it has been so obscured by commentators); and therefore I have inserted in this volume a reprint of the first English translation of the *Hystorie of Hamblet*. It is reprinted from Hazlitt's *Shakespeare's Library*, part 1, vol. ii. (1875).

A student who has at hand this *Hystorie of Hamblet*, and copies of the *First* and *Second Quartos*, and the *First Folio*, as well as a modern edition of *Hamlet*, is ready to follow intelligently the succeeding exposition of the play. The modern edition from which the quotations needed for it have been made is the Globe edition of the *Cambridge Shakespeare*, prepared by Wright and Clark.

II.

THE first words uttered by Hamlet after the ghost reveals the dreadful story of his mother's adultery with Claudius, and his father's murder by him—

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
> And shall I couple hell?—

are not to be found in the Actor's Edition, and, in dramatic representation, they are usually altered or entirely omitted. The succeeding words—

> O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up—

are sometimes given, but not always. Actors cut this Second Soliloquy according to their individual fancy, omitting and retaining what they please.

There must be some reason for this omission, other than the length of the drama. We should expect the whole of this soliloquy to be given, because the revelation of the ghost, and its influence on Hamlet afford the whole motive for his future conduct in the play. It would seem natural to expose to the audience, as clearly as possible, every operation of Hamlet's mind, immediately after he receives a command that, in its fulfillment, results in the immolation of all but one of the principal characters in the Tragedy. That this soliloquy is

omitted, or cut short, is an indication either that its importance is not appreciated, or that it contains inherent difficulties of presentation that an actor cannot overcome. I believe both reasons are operative in suppressing it, and that they both result from a mistake in punctuating the second line of the soliloquy,—

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
> And shall I couple hell?

An actor could not, immediately after the revelation of the ghost, declaim these lines, as they stand, and present them to the ear, without exciting a sense of ridicule in his hearers. The anti-climax would be too marked to be endurable.

What is the situation—to use a play-wright's word—when these lines are spoken? They occur very near the beginning of the play. Hamlet has already been introduced to the audience, and is represented as indulging a deep grief at his father's death, his mother's fickleness (*not* her wickedness), and his own disappointed hopes,—for he had expected the election to the throne to light on him, instead of on his uncle Claudius. On this occasion, his second appearance in the play, he has so far controlled himself in the solitary indulgence of his sorrow, that he has come at midnight to the outer platform of the castle, with two friends, expecting there to meet the dead king's ghost, which, they have told him, has already thrice appeared. The apparition comes again, and Hamlet recognizes the spirit as his father's and credits its almost incredible disclosure.

It is as the ghost vanishes, after making its horrible revelation, that these lines are spoken.

We see Hamlet, on the fading of the ghost, paralyzed by the revelation of his uncle's and his mother's wickedness, overcome by grief and horror and disgust, and by the immensity of the task he is expected to perform. He can not realize how such a burden was imposed on him as duty. He feels that the foundations of the moral world are crumbling, and, reaching after something stable and unchangeable, he exclaims (as the present punctuation enjoins):

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
> And shall I couple hell? O, fie!

This is not natural: who, in such a condition of mind, would call on heaven and earth, and stop to ask, or even think,

> And shall I couple hell?

It is too cold-blooded: we can not believe that Hamlet would pick his phrases at such a moment; that he could invoke the hosts of heaven and earth, and stop to consider if he should also appeal to hell, or that he was so dainty in his speech that he exclaimed *O, fie!* at the mere suggestion. This is not Hamlet's nature. The incongruity of the questions,—*what else? And shall I couple hell?*—just after the invocation to heaven and earth, is shocking. It is not possible that Hamlet could pause to select his form of aspiration, and critically cry, *O, fie!* on the rejection of the suggestion to couple hell, when he was possessed by so deep emotion as his succeeding words

reveal. Players feel this, and if they retain the first two lines of this soliloquy they omit from them the words,—*what else?* and *O, fie,* and make *And shall I couple hell?* express, not a question only, but the conviction that hell too must be included in the invocation:—*shall* has the force of *must.*

What seems to be the true interpretation of these lines suggested itself in the same hour when their incongruity was first noticed. As the play was afterward read and re-read, every speech and action so fitted into and agreed with this interpretation that the conclusion was unavoidable that the mistake had been made by some modern editor, and continued without notice of the change, and therefore without correction. Thinking this, I believed that the audiences before the Restoration had understood and loved the Tragedy because this interpretation, which I thought they then possessed, gave them the key to it; and I tried to shut out from my mind every explanation of the play that I had ever entertained, and to examine it by the help of this new light, as if it were a new creation. In this I succeeded beyond my expectations; at each reading a new harmony developed itself, and I was confirmed in my belief that an unnoticed misprint had created the mystery that envelops Hamlet.

But when I went to the various editions, early and late, for proof of my conjecture, I found the error everywhere reproduced. The passage was the same, or varied very slightly,—an "Oh" for an "O," may be. Some few editions commented on the passage, but not to elucidate it. Steevens thought the

words *O, fie!* " might have been the marginal reprehension of some scrupulous reader, to whom the MS. had been communicated before it found its way to the press." Reed said of *O, fie!* "These words (which hurt the measure, and from that circumstance and their almost ludicrous turn may be suspected as an interpolation) are found only in the two earliest quartos." He did not mean the Quarto of 1603; this was not then discovered. Dyce thought the words might be omitted, and Capell boldly thrust them out as "impertinent in the highest degree." George MacDonald, noticing *And shall I couple hell?* could only say, "He must! His father is there," and Marshall, in his *Study of Hamlet*, has this passage:

On the Soliloquy "O all you host of heaven!"

"This soliloquy is not a long one; but it is a very important one. It is the key-note to that wild perturbation of mind in which Hamlet remains during the rest of this act. The vehement aspiration with which it commences—

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
> And shall I couple hell?

is succeeded by the expression—

> O, fie!

which recalls to our memories the words in the former soliloquy—

> Fie on't! ah fie!

Here the exclamation may be taken in two ways; either as a self-rebuke for the mention of hell, or as a reproach directed against his own weakness on the part of Hamlet. I think the latter the best

interpretation, especially if we consider the words which follow immediately:

> Hold, hold, my heart;
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up."

I turned to the Folio of 1623; there the passage reads,

> Oh all you host of Heaven! Oh Earth; what els?
> And shall I couple Hell? Oh fie: hold my heart;
> And you my sinnewes, grow not instant Old;
> But beare me stiffely up.

In the Quarto of 1604 I found,

> O all you hoſt of heauen, ô earth, what els,
> And ſhall I coupple hell, ô fie, hold, hold my hart,
> And you my ſinnowes, growe not inſtant old,
> But beare me ſwiftly vp.

and the Quarto of 1603 reads,

> O all you hoſte of heauen! O earth, what elſe?
> And ſhall I couple hell; remember thee?

Nowhere did I find the reading I was searching for; but I was not convinced that the present reading is the true one. The punctuation of the Folio was not done by Shakespeare, it differed from the Quartos, they differed from each other, and all from the modern punctuation: I believe all are incorrect. But the Quarto of 1604 was printed in Shakespeare's lifetime, "according to the true and perfect coppie"; this Quarto does not impose any absolute interpretation of this passage on the reader; commas, denoting a pause, are the only stops employed:

O all you hoſt of heauen, ô earth, what els,
And ſhall I coupple hell, ô fie, hold, hold my hart,
And you my ſinnowes, growe not inſtant old,
But beare me ſwiftely vp.

It is possible that the proper punctuation was not understood by the compositor, who may have inserted these commas, believing that the actor would substitute the needed stops; but, while an actor might, and probably would, punctuate his own manuscript copy of his part, he would not make the correction in the printed stage copy, and thus, the later editions being printed one from another, the proper pointing may never have been adopted. This seems plausible, especially when we observe that in the First Quarto, in which, however, we do not find the apostrophe,

O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up—

the punctuation is much more elaborate. In the modern editions the substitutions for the commas in the Second Quarto are as follows:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up.

Let us punctuate once more; let us alter the place of an interrogation point, and read:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple? Hell! O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up.

We know that no fault was more common than the interchange or omission of ? and ! ; and this I believe is what Shakespeare wrote.

Hamlet has just been told that his father was murdered by the uncle who is now married to his mother, and the duty to avenge this murder has been imposed on him ; he has been told that his mother's seeming virtue is a sham, that her apparent love for his father was only a cover for her intrigue with Claudius, and from the terms of the disclosure he believes that Gertrude was also a party to her husband's murder. Murderess and Adulteress,—these are the names by which he must henceforth designate his mother ! Prostrated, devastated by the disclosure, he exclaims,

O all you host of heaven ! O earth ! what else ?

What must I prepare for next ? Instead of wondering whether he shall violate the proprieties, and "couple hell" with heaven and earth, he instinctively thinks of his love for Ophelia, and contemplates it in the light of his father's revelation : the possible results of a marriage with her occur to him, and his instant repudiation of them and her, and of the idea of any marriage, is shown by the intolerant exclamations,

And shall I couple ? Hell !

What else ? does not mean, What else can I invoke ? What else shall I unite with heaven and earth ? What else can I turn to for aid ?—but it is the broken-hearted cry of a young soul who finds himself bereft of father, of kingdom, and of his faith

in woman's love and virtue. *What else* can be taken from him? From what quarter can a new blow be dealt him? *What else* remains? As a sequence to this thought comes the recollection of what had promised him a life of happiness. Ophelia's love—that still is his. But the revelation of the ghost has made him clear-sighted: he had already marveled at his mother's short lived grief; before the disclosure of her guilt he had reached the conclusion, "Frailty, thy name is woman." Now he instantly measures Ophelia by her, he compares the two, and from his knowledge of Ophelia's character (he had given private time to her) he conceives that she will be as pliant under temptation as his mother has been: she will be no crown of rubies to him: a marriage with her will be no true union. He asks the question full of derision, of loathing, and of indignation,

And shall I couple?

and, answering it to his wounded heart, he rejects her then and there; rejects her with an oath that shows his disgust at the possibilities his derisive word has suggested. By this renunciation Hamlet strips himself of all that makes youth lovely and life desirable; he pulls down upon himself the temple of his love, and he staggers as he stands amid the ruins. We know what his thoughts are, and our hearts ache in sympathy with his, as he contemplates the barrenness of his future life. Gradually he recovers himself, and slowly says: "O fie!" [Fie upon this weakness.]

Hold, hold,my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up.

Does not this reading, without any alteration of the text, cast a new light on Hamlet's character, and on all the conduct of the play? Does not the whole play become explicable the moment we put the interrogation point after the word *couple?* By the interpretation that this change allows, I hope to show that all Hamlet's words and actions before this question (demonstrations which we do not see, but which we know were made) are consistent with his love, all after it consistent with his repudiation of Ophelia: from this moment we think of Hamlet as an unhappy lover, and Ophelia's relation to him is made much more prominent and beautiful. By this interpretation, the play becomes the subject of practicable, interesting study and analysis, the words and acts of the principal characters fall into a harmony, most of the obscure passages can be illuminated, and the whole scheme, plot, and progress of the play become more interesting. By this interpretation the necessity for believing Hamlet insane is removed; it is made to appear that he did fulfill his father's command *without unnecessary delay*, and his discrimination of character is marvelously exhibited.

I feel sure, however, that Shakespearean students will not at once be willing to accept it; they do not yet realize how absolutely essential it is. The reader, who can review and study the different scenes of the Tragedy, may, even without this interpretation,

by piecing them together, construct the story, but without understanding every part, for each reader conceives a different interpretation for certain passages. But the auditor, who sees the drama on the stage and is hurried along with its rapidly changing action, must, thus early in the play, hear this explicit expression of Hamlet's intention to renounce Ophelia, in order to enable him to apprehend the object of Hamlet's represented and reported actions in the succeeding scenes; without this expression, he could not divine it. The proof of this is that they are not understood now by either readers or hearers.

A play-goer who has not read the play carefully does not and can not understand it as it is now presented on the stage; from one hearing he could not even get a coherent idea of the story. Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's closet, his conversation with Polonius, his letter to Ophelia, seem utterly without motive until the third act, when he finally repudiates the maiden; up to that time and beyond, they seem only the manifestations of Hamlet's madness, arising from no special cause, and having no special fitness of application.

The play is not understood by readers and careful students even. Think how widely their interpretations differ. They can not all be right, but each one would contend that Shakespeare intended to represent the special things that *his* interpretation makes possible. Shakespeare could have meant to present only one story; it was not meant to change with the varying points of view from which

different students considered it. I think that the interpretation I suggest for—

And shall I couple? Hell!—

if it be presented on the stage, or considered in the study, furnishes the one key that unlocks every difficulty in the play, and I hope that even ripe scholars will be tolerant until they have examined the whole play with reference to it. It may be more difficult for them to come to a judgment than for a mind ignorant of Shakespearean criticism, for they will first have to set aside their already accepted interpretations.

It may be objected that, after all, the interpretation I suggest must be proved from the play, and that it only adds another to the many theories that have already been advanced. To this I reply—with modesty, and an ardent desire to be proven in the wrong if I be wrong—that it seems to me the theory I advance destroys all other theories; it furnishes the one and only coherent, comprehensible, *provable* explication of the *Tragedy of Hamlet*. For nearly three hundred years it has been possible to misunderstand, not special passages only, but the fundamental intention of the play; during that time no satisfactory explanation of *all* its obscurities has been advanced. I believe this theory explains them; and this belief, based on careful study and comparison, ought to excuse the seeming vanity and presumption of the preceding statement. Therefore with the assumption that Shakespeare wrote,

And shall I couple?

I intend now to review the progress of the play. As a preliminary step I shall arrange a synopsis of the tragedy which will indicate the time at which each thing was done or said; in its proper relation to the time each other thing was done or said. Much of the confusion of our ideas has resulted from a confusion of time. The Folio of 1623 does not divide the whole play into acts: the beginning of the first act, of course, is plain, and the beginning of the second act is placed, in the Folio, where we still place it. This division is correct as far as it goes, but in the Folio there is no further discrimination of the acts. I do not know any edition that is correctly divided throughout, although what should be the division is appreciated by various Shakespearean scholars, and Marshall indicates pretty nearly the proper scheme of time; but the usual arrangement of acts and scenes has been productive of a great deal of misunderstanding. To investigate the play properly we must fix in our minds a correct scheme of the time occupied in each scene, and its relation, in closeness or distance, to all that precedes and all that follows it.

III.

SIX months is the space of time covered by the *Tragedy of Hamlet*. This includes the time from the murder of the elder Hamlet to the final clearing of the stage. This period of six months is divided into three periods of about two months each: the first period includes the time from the king's murder through the night on which his spirit reveals itself to Hamlet; the second period includes the time that elapses between the revelation of the ghost and the hour of Hamlet's departure from Denmark; and the third period includes the time from Hamlet's departure from Denmark to the end of the play.

The occurrences of only the last two days of each of these periods are presented on the stage, *i.e.*, six days in all. Into six days is crowded the portrayal of Claudius's perfidy, Hamlet's misery, and Ophelia's madness. Six days present to us Hamlet receiving the command of his father's spirit, Hamlet determining that the command is binding, and Hamlet gladly yielding up his life after performing every particular of the ghost's behest. To make this evident, we must examine the sequence of the scenes, and the time occupied in their representation.

The action is represented as taking place in Denmark; but Shakespeare, from whatever source he re-

ceived the suggestions for his plays, transplanted them to England, and adapted them to English surroundings, conforming them to the customs of the time in which he lived. It is winter when the play opens, probably December:

> 'Tis bitter cold.—I. i. 8.
> The air bites shrewdly: it is very cold.—I. iv. 1.

It is barely two months since the king was killed while sleeping in his orchard, where he hardly would have taken his siesta, had the month been later than October.

Marcellus seems to fix the time of the opening of the play as very near Christmas:

> Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
> The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
> And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
> The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.—I. i. 158.

This seems to suggest itself to his mind as an explanation for their escaping injury from this "extravagant and erring spirit"; the spell of the season may have been upon it.

The play ends in the spring—the last of April or the first of May. This is indicated by the flowers that Ophelia distributes, and those of which she makes her fantastic garlands (IV. v. 175; IV. viii. 169), daisies, pansies, columbine, crow-flowers, nettles, and long-purples. All these are flowers of early summer, and in England, where the seasons are more forward than with us, they bloom in April and

in May. Ophelia gathers them the day before the last day of the play.

The time of the opening scene is at the end of the First Period of two months. The whole of this period does not appear in representation; part of it appears in narration only. The address of Claudius (I. ii. 1) informs us of the death of the late king, and his marriage with his widow, and Hamlet's First Soliloquy (I. ii. 129) shows us that his father has been dead about two months:

> But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:

and also that within a month of his father's death his mother has married again:

> within a month—
> . . . or ere those shoes were old
> With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—
> . . . married with my uncle.

This soliloquy fixes the time of the opening scene as at the end of the first period of two months. The occurrences of only the last two days of this period are represented in the play.

SCENE I. ACT I. The first scene occupies the time from midnight until daybreak:

> *Ber.* 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.—I. i. 7.
> *Hor.* But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.—I. i. 166.

In it the ghost for the third time appears to the watch, who agree that they must tell Hamlet of the circumstance.

SCENE II. ACT I. The second scene opens in the morning, some hours later:

Mar. I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently.—I. i. 174.

Claudius, in a room of state in the royal castle, addresses his courtiers, dispatches ambassadors to Norway, gives Laertes leave to return to France, and reproaches Hamlet for the continued exhibition of his grief at his father's death. Hamlet consents to remain in Elsinore, and, by his First Soliloquy, informs us of his unhappiness, and of his disgust at his mother's inconstancy. He is interrupted by Horatio and the sentinels, who tell him their story, and he decides to watch that night himself.

SCENE III. ACT I. Scene III. is subsequent to the preceding, but on the same day. In it Ophelia is introduced. Laertes, in bidding her farewell, cautions her most earnestly to guard her honor: Polonius enters, and, after Laertes' departure, he repeats his son's caution, showing great fear that his daughter may not preserve her virtue. That Scene III. is on the same day as the preceding one is shown by Scene IV., which follows it, and which represents Hamlet carrying out his determination:

I will watch to-night.—I. ii. 242.

SCENE IV. ACT I. Scene IV., on the platform outside the castle, takes place at midnight of the day we have been considering, just twenty-four hours after the opening of the play:

Hor. I think it lacks of twelve.
Ham. No, it is struck.—I. iv. 3.

In this scene Hamlet is waiting with his friends for the ghost, who enters almost immediately after twelve. The ghost beckons Hamlet, who leaves the platform with it.

SCENE V. ACT I. Scene V., on another part of the platform, opens a few minutes later, and the action continues until dawn.

Ghost. The glow-worm shows the matin to be near.—I. v. 89.

In this scene Hamlet is told by the ghost, that his father was murdered by his uncle, and that his mother was false to her husband during his lifetime. He is commanded to revenge his father and remove Claudius from "the royal bed." He accepts the obligation, and, in consequence of the revelation of his mother's adultery, determines that he will not marry, expressing this in the words of the Second Soliloquy:

> And shall I couple? Hell!

His friends come to seek him, and he swears them to secrecy as to what they have seen and heard, and as to the cause for his conduct should he at any future time "see fit to put an antic disposition on."

This closes the first act, at daybreak of the second day. The time consumed in this act is part of two days—from midnight of the first day to dawn of the second day, and from morning of the second day to dawn again. These two days end the First Period of about two months.

The Second Period of about two months passes, with the exception of the last two days, before we again see any of the characters of the play. That

about two months elapse is deduced from a passage in Act III., Scene II. Hamlet says, during the mock-play:

> What should a man do but be merry? for, look you, how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.—III. ii. 131.

Ophelia replies—

> Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

We have already seen, in Act I., that the elder Hamlet had then been dead about two months. Two months therefore intervene between the first act and the mock-play, and the mock-play (as will appear) takes place the next night after the second act opens. All the action of Act II. is continuous, though not all of it occurs in one place.

SCENE I. ACT II. The opening scene of the second act represents a room in Polonius's house. The time is probably early morning. I think this because Polonius would naturally start off a post to his son, who has been two months in France, early in the day: this he does on the opening of the second act. As Reynaldo, the messenger, departs, Ophelia enters and tells her father that Hamlet, in a very perturbed state of mind, and disheveled condition of apparel, has just entered and left her chamber. I think this also indicates early morning. After a sleepless night, without arranging the disorder of his clothing, Hamlet rushes into Ophelia's presence, hoping to decide by sight of her whether he is right in doubting her ability to resist temptation. The decision is given against her, and he

leaves her as abruptly as he came. Ophelia hastens to tell her father of the occurrence, and Polonius, concluding that Hamlet is mad for Ophelia's love, determines to go at once to the king to tell him that this is the cause of the change in Hamlet's bearing. He sets out for the castle, and while he is going thither we are shown—

SCENE II. ACT II. This represents a room in the castle. The action is continuous with the preceding. The king and queen receive Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, for whom they have sent, hoping their society may prove beneficial to Hamlet, who is overcome with melancholy. (Recollect that Hamlet has been sad since his father's death, and that the revelation of the ghost, while it gave him ground to hope for a change in his situation, has given him additional cause for grief. It has constrained him to doubt his mother and Ophelia. He has been unable to convince himself that the story of the ghost is true, and, from its enormity, he fears that the apparition was the devil, inciting him to commit murder.) Polonius arrives from his house, as these gentlemen are leaving the royal presence,—they are going to find Hamlet. Polonius announces that the ambassadors to Norway who had been dispatched two months before (I. ii. 33) have returned, and he also informs the king that he has found the cause of Hamlet's madness. He brings in the ambassadors, who make their report, and then assures the king and queen that Hamlet is mad for Ophelia's love, and reads them the letter the prince has written to her. He suggests that a meeting of Hamlet and

Ophelia be contrived, at which the king and he shall be present unseen; this is assented to. He sees Hamlet approaching and begs to be left alone with him, designing to discover more of his madness. Hamlet sees Polonius's belief, and, falling in with the idea, feigns madness, and, under the license it would give, tells Polonius to watch his daughter, saying, "conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to't." This conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet exhibits sadness but no insanity in his talk with them, and they tell him the players are coming to Elsinore. Polonius, who left the room when these two friends entered it, returns to tell Hamlet the same thing, and Hamlet ridicules and abuses him, confirming Polonius's belief that he is mad. The players enter. Hamlet receives them cordially and requires one of them to repeat a speech that he had before heard him declaim. This speech suggests to Hamlet a means to discover whether the ghost was really his father's spirit or only an emissary of the devil; he decides to have a play presented the next night.

We'll ha't to-morrow night.—II. ii. 565.

in which some inserted lines shall tent his uncle to the quick, if he be guilty, and so confirm the story of the ghost. When Polonius and the players, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, leave Hamlet he utters the Third Soliloquy, in which he blames himself for delaying to act on the ghost's injunction, but justifies himself to the audience, by the expression of

his fear that the spirit he has seen may be the devil, who abuses him to damn him. The second act closes with the expression of Hamlet's determination to have proof, by the mock-play, of his uncle's guilt or innocence.

All these—the dispatching Reynaldo; Ophelia's story to her father; the reception, first of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and then of the ambassadors on their return from Norway; Polonius's story to the king and queen; his interview with Hamlet; the conversation of Hamlet with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; the second chaffing of Polonius; the entrance and exit of the players; and Hamlet's Third Soliloquy—are represented as succeeding one another during one day, the first day of the second period. The two scenes of the second act are filled with only one day's happenings.

Act III. represents the occurrences of the second day and night of the second period. In Act III. most of what is now called Act IV. should be included: the action is continuous from the beginning of Act III. to the end of the fourth scene of Act IV. Everything represented in the third act, and in the first four scenes of the fourth act, took place within the space of twenty-four hours. If the division into acts and scenes were made correctly, Act IV. would begin with the fifth scene of the fourth act.

SCENE I. ACT III. The first scene of the third act opens upon a room in the castle. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern make their first report to their employers; they can not discover why Hamlet has so entirely changed his bearing, and while they re-

port that he received them "most like a gentleman," they assume that he is mad. They tell the king that the players

> have already order
> This night to play before him.—III. i. 20.

This speech fixes the time of the third act. Hamlet has said,

> We'll ha't to-morrow night.—II. ii. 565.

and now we see that the order is for "to-night,"—evidently this is the succeeding day to the one in which Hamlet gives the direction. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave the royal presence as soon as they have made their report, and the king asks Gertrude also to withdraw: he tells her he has sent for Hamlet, who, when he comes, shall find only Ophelia, since he intends, with Polonius, to hide behind the arras and witness their encounter. (This, remember, is on the day after Hamlet had broken into Ophelia's presence, and on the same day as the mock-play in which he finally separates himself from her.) The king and Polonius, leaving Ophelia in the apartment, hide as Hamlet enters, and he, not at first observing the maid, exposes the subject of his thoughts to the hidden king, in the Fourth Soliloquy, *To be, or not to be.* When he perceives Ophelia, forgetting for a moment his decision that she will not be faithful if tempted, he addresses her kindly, but soon becomes very bitter, deriding her for wishing to marry, and telling her instead to go to a nunnery. When he leaves her she is doubly convinced that he is mad. The king and Polonius re-enter, and Claudius, alarmed by the soliloquy, and

by the threat against himself that he had overheard, resolves to send Hamlet at once to England, and so tells Polonius, who assents to Claudius's decision, but still insists that the beginning of Hamlet's madness sprang from neglected love. He therefore suggests that, after the play, the queen shall summon Hamlet to her closet, and question him as to the cause of his unhappiness; he proposes to hide behind the arras there, and, overhearing their conversation, report it to the king. To this the king agrees.

SCENE II. ACT III. represents a hall in the castle, on the evening of the day we have just spoken of. Hamlet is giving the players instructions how to speak the speech he wishes them to insert in the mock-play; as the players go out, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter with Polonius, and tell Hamlet that the king and queen will hear the play at once. He sends them all to hasten the preparations of the players, and thus secures an opportunity to speak to Horatio alone. He desires Horatio, whom he had formerly told of the ghost's revelation, to watch the king closely during the mock-play, and observe whether any part shall make him blench. The king and queen, Ophelia, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the court, come in, and the play begins, Hamlet indicating to the audience his contemptuous estimation of Ophelia by his disgusting conversation with her before and during its representation. Claudius, self-convicted by his agitation during the play, leaves the hall with all but Hamlet and Horatio. Hamlet exhibits his nervous

joy at the success of his detective scheme, and decides that the ghost is really his father's spirit, and that, as he can believe its story, he is now free to accomplish its behest. While he is speaking, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, and Hamlet breaks off his conversation with Horatio by calling for some music; this he does as they come in, for the purpose of misleading them as to the subject of his conversation with his friend. They have come to tell him that his mother desires to see him at once. Hamlet's answers are ambiguous and ironical, but at last he clearly indicates to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his contempt for them, and his knowledge that they are the creatures of the king who spy upon him. Polonius interrupts them, bringing the same message from the queen that the two spies have already delivered, and Hamlet experiments with him to discover to what degree he is considered mad. A short soliloquy at the end of this scene shows Hamlet, convinced that the ghost had spoken sooth, ready to kill his uncle, and restraining himself from the temptation to kill his mother.

SCENE III. ACT III. represents a room in the castle shortly after the mock-play. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have returned to the king after having given Hamlet his mother's message, and Claudius, in their short absence having determined to send Hamlet at once to England, tells them of his decision, and instructs them that they shall go along with him. They retire to make hasty preparations for their voyage, and Polonius, entering, tells

Claudius that Hamlet is going to his mother's closet, and then departs to take his station behind the arras. The king, left alone, exhibits to the audience, by a soliloquy, the effect the mock-play has produced upon him; his conscience is awakened, and he retires a little and attempts to pray. Hamlet enters, and, seeing Claudius on his knees, unconscious of his presence, rushes forward to kill him; but, for what seems to him a satisfactory reason, he refrains from doing so, and goes to his mother, who is awaiting him.

SCENE IV. ACT III. discloses Gertrude and Polonius in conversation in Gertrude's closet, or oratory, to which Hamlet is coming. Polonius withdraws as Hamlet enters. Hamlet has come to the interview believing the story of the ghost, and anxious to accomplish the injunction,

> Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damned incest.

He speaks harshly to his mother, and restrains her when she would go and call the king; she cries for help, and Polonius echoes her from behind the hangings. Hamlet, believing the cry comes from the king, runs his sword through the arras and kills Polonius. But little disturbed by this death, being engrossed in the duty he must perform, Hamlet so converses with his mother—who does not yet believe him mad—that her conscience is awakened, and Hamlet has reason to hope that he can accomplish the most difficult part of his father's obligation. While he is reviling his uncle the ghost enters the queen's apartment and addresses Hamlet, who

answers him, but the ghost's voice is not audible to Gertrude. She asks Hamlet to whom he speaks, and his replies convince her that her son is mad. This opinion he disproves, and induces his mother to promise that she will conceal from Claudius that he is not really insane, but "only mad in craft." This promise, and the silence with which she receives Hamlet's exhortations, show us that he is on the high road to the fulfillment of his vow; he is detaching his mother's love from Claudius, and, when this is accomplished, killing him will be easy. Hamlet and his mother both leave the stage, Hamlet dragging the dead body of Polonius with him. The queen goes straight to the king; their interview is shown in the scene that by the present arrangement is considered the first scene of the fourth act. It is very improper to begin a new act here; the occurrences of this night should all be included in the third act, and the fourth act should not begin until what is now represented as the fifth scene of the fourth act.

SCENE I. ACT IV. (which should be Scene V. Act III.) represents Gertrude telling Claudius that Hamlet, in an attack of frenzy, has killed Polonius, whose body he is now drawing aside. She had promised to conceal the fact of Hamlet's sanity from the king, and she now asserts that he is mad. Claudius calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and dispatches them to look for Hamlet, and then, with Gertrude, leaves the scene, going to call up some of their wise counselors and advise with them what is now best to do.

SCENE II. ACT IV. (which should be Scene VI. Act III.) represents another room in the castle. Hamlet enters, followed by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have found him, but who can not discover from him where he has left Polonius's body. The three go together to the king.

SCENE III. ACT. IV. (which should be Scene VII. Act III.) exhibits their entrance to the king's presence. Hamlet indicates to Claudius where he has left the dead councilor, and Claudius tells him he —Hamlet—must at once depart to England to protect himself from the consequences of this murder, but, on Hamlet's exit, Claudius reveals that he has sent to England, with Hamlet, a command for his instant death.

SCENE IV. ACT. IV. (which should be Scene VIII. Act. III.) shows Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in the early morning, after the night we have been considering, going to the ship which is to bear them away from Denmark. That this is the time is shown by Claudius's words:

> The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch,
> But we will ship him hence. —IV. i. 29.

and,

> I'll have him hence to-night. —IV. iii. 58.

They meet Fortinbras and his soldiers, who are marching across Denmark toward Poland, and Hamlet questions them as to their destination, and, in his Sixth Soliloquy, compares the activity of Fortinbras with his own inaction. This soliloquy, as the play is now divided, closes the fourth scene of the fourth act; it should close the third act. This early

morning scene completes the representation of the happenings of the second day of the Second Period. In this second day Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have made their first report; Hamlet has encountered Ophelia and reviled her, and by his soliloquy has alarmed the king; he has instructed the players how to speak the speech which was to unkennel his uncle's guilt; the mock-play has been presented, and Claudius, by his agitation, has confirmed the ghost's story, and afterward he has determined to send Hamlet at once to England; Hamlet has awakened his mother's consciousness of guilt; has killed Polonius, believing him to be the king; and has been dispatched from Denmark. The two days which we have just considered close the Second Period of about two months. At their ending we find Hamlet convinced that the story of the ghost is true, and already endeavoring to accomplish its commands. He has made some progress in separating his mother from his uncle, and the remonstrance he has directed toward her continues to prick her conscience and carry on the good work. The interruption of his departure from Denmark postpones further effort in this direction, but does not compel him to abandon it, or his design ultimately to kill the king. The last words of the Sixth Soliloquy assert this.

The Third Period of about two months passes, with the exception of the last two days, before we again see any of the characters of the play. It is impossible to prove this by quotation,—the proof is inferential only. Laertes, for whom Ophelia probably sent as soon as her father was killed, has re-

turned secretly to Elsinore ;—the journey to France and back must have consumed about two months. The ambassadors from England, who come to tell the king that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been executed, in compliance with his supposed command, arrive during the last scene. The voyage to England and back must have consumed about two months ;—the voyage of the ambassadors to Norway and back had consumed fully two. Fortinbras's expedition against Poland, from which he returns at the end of the play, must have occupied considerable time. The only direct testimony that the text gives is in Claudius's words to Laertes about Lamond—the Norman :

> Two months since,
> Here was a gentlemân of Normandy. —IV. vii. 82.

We know from this speech that Hamlet was in Elsinore with Lamond two months before this conversation, but we do not know that he remained there any length of time after Lamond's arrival ; he may have been dispatched at once to England.

Hamlet returns to Denmark on the first day of the Third Period, and is killed on the second day ; during his absence from Denmark he had been most of the time in the hands of the pirates. The first thing presented to us, on the first day of the Third Period, is Ophelia's madness ; this first day should begin Act IV., but it is now considered :

SCENE V. ACT IV. This scene opens in a room in the castle. Horatio and an attendant gentleman persuade the queen to admit Ophelia. She enters, and, by her songs, indicates that grief at her father's death

and disappointed love for Hamlet have dethroned her reason. When she departs, followed by Horatio, Claudius, who has come in, enumerates his causes for unhappiness. He is interrupted by the entrance of a gentleman, who warns him that Laertes is approaching the apartment at the head of a mob. Laertes enters and arraigns the king for his father's death, and the disrespect shown him in his obscure funeral. He is interrupted by the re-appearance of Ophelia, who makes evident to her brother her loss of reason. On her departure Claudius and Laertes retire, while the king tells the latter the circumstances of Polonius's death.

SCENE VI. ACT IV. (which should be Scene II. Act IV.) discloses sailors who bring letters from Hamlet to Horatio, telling him the prince has returned to Denmark, and how he accomplished his return; they also have letters to the king and queen. These they deliver to an attendant, and then lead Horatio to the place where Hamlet awaits his coming.

SCENE VII. ACT IV. (which should be Scene III. Act IV.) discovers Claudius and Laertes in another room of the castle, continuing the conversation, in which—out of our sight and hearing—the king tells Laertes how Hamlet had killed Polonius. The messenger brings in the letters from Hamlet, which surprise and alarm the king, as they tell him the prince has returned alone to Denmark. He conceives a plan and unfolds it to Laertes, by which Hamlet shall be slain in a fencing match, by seeming accident. Laertes agrees to do his part—to stab Ham-

let with an unbated foil which shall be poisoned—and Claudius adds that he will prepare a poisoned drink which Hamlet shall quaff. Their conspiracy is shortened by the entrance of the queen, who tells Laertes that Ophelia has just been drowned. This catastrophe is the last of the occurrences of this day. The action from Scene V. Act IV. to the end of the act is continuous, and all takes place on the first day of the Third Period. On this day the queen receives Ophelia; Laertes breaks into the castle and assails the king; Ophelia again enters, and thus acquaints her brother with her loss of reason; Horatio and the king receive letters from Hamlet; Claudius and Laertes concoct a plot to kill him; and Gertrude tells them of Ophelia's death by drowning.

The second day of the Third Period, and the last day of the play, is the time occupied by Act V. Its two scenes occur on the same day, and this day is the day after Ophelia's death and Hamlet's return to Denmark. This appears from Claudius's appeal to Laertes at Ophelia's grave:

> Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech;
> We'll put the matter to the present push.—V. i. 317.

and from Hamlet's letter to the king:

> To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes.—IV. vii. 45.

SCENE I. ACT V. It is now "to-morrow." Hamlet, occupied with thoughts of the king's death, walks with Horatio in the churchyard, and is there surprised by the entrance of the court, who follow some corse that did fordo its own life. Hamlet

and Horatio retire behind the tombs to wait until the funeral be over, but Laertes's words disclose to Hamlet that Ophelia is dead. His grief then compels him to discover himself, but, after a brief contention with Laertes, he regains his self-control and at once withdraws, followed by Horatio. Claudius entreats Laertes to be patient, reminding him of the plan by which they mean to secure "an hour of quiet."

SCENE II. ACT V. represents a hall in the castle. Hamlet, meaning to kill Claudius, has gone thither, with Horatio, from the churchyard. On the way he has told his friend all the particulars of the ghost's revelation, and has explained why he repulsed the maid he loved so dearly; he has recalled to Horatio the mock-play, the killing of Polonius, and his extrusion from Denmark, and Horatio has told him all he knows about Ophelia. We now hear Hamlet telling his friend how he discovered his uncle's treachery, and how, changing their commission, he sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to England to their death, and returned to Denmark himself in the pirate ship with proof of Claudius's design against him. He contends that he is morally justified in killing the king, and then he expresses regret that he has offended Laertes. Osric interrupts him by bringing a challenge to a friendly fencing match with Laertes, which Hamlet accepts. The court enter to see the fencing, and during the encounter Hamlet and Laertes each receive a mortal wound from the poisoned foil, and the queen dies from drinking the draught prepared by Claudius for her

son. Hamlet, knowing that death is near, rushes upon the king and stabs him, also, with the poisoned point. As Hamlet dies Fortinbras and the ambassadors from England enter, and Horatio retires with them to explain the causes for these many deaths. Thus ends the play, and thus ends the second day of the Third Period.

This long argument and synopsis have been made necessary by the wrong numbering of the scenes, and by the confusion as to the time occupied by the different acts. The six days of the play by this synopsis have been discriminated, and the occurrences of each one of them have been ascribed to the day to which they belong. I hope this will be an aid to the understanding of the play.

IV.

THE next thing needful in considering the Tragedy of *Hamlet* is at once to inquire how old Shakespeare represents his hero to be; until this is determined with approximate certainty, Hamlet is burdened with a disguise,—the disguise in which we clothe him when we endow him with years that are not justly his.

The only direct evidence on the subject is the testimony of the grave-digger. Hamlet asks him:

> How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

he replies:

> Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.
>
> How long is that since?

asks Hamlet:

> Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he that is mad, and sent into England.

Further in the scene the grave-digger asserts:

> I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

At first sight this seems conclusive; he has been sexton thirty years, and he came to it the very day young Hamlet was born. Evidently Hamlet must be thirty years old. But the statement

> I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years,

admits of explanation. The sexton is the sacristan; the sacristan has charge of the vestments and the sacramental vessels, and is not necessarily the grave-digger. A boy may be a sacristan, and often is, but it is not probable that a boy would be a grave-maker. The clown was probably first a sacristan, whose duties were inside the church; and then, as he advanced to man's estate and strength, he became the grave-digger. He had been sexton man *and boy* thirty years; he came to grave-making the day young Hamlet was born. It is not absolutely certain that he came to grave-making thirty years before, and therefore it is not absolutely certain that Hamlet is thirty years of age.

But, speaking of Yorick's skull, the grave-digger says:

> Here's a skull now; this skull has lain in the earth three and twenty years.

Hamlet says:

> Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times.

Yorick has lain in the grave three-and-twenty years, and he has carried Hamlet on his back a thousand times?—assuredly Hamlet must be at least thirty years old? We should say *yes*, at once, to this, did not a reference to the Quarto of 1603 show that in that edition the grave-digger says of a skull—the only one with which any time is associated—

Looke you, heres a ſcull hath bin here this dozen yeare,
Let me ſee, I euer ſince our last king *Hamlet*
Slew *Fortenbraſſe* in combat, yong *Hamlets* father,
Hee that's mad.
Ham. I mary, how came he madde?
Clowne. I faith very ſtrangely, by looſing of his wittes.
Ham. Vpon what ground?
Clowne. A this ground, in *Denmarke.*
Ham. Where is he now?
Clowne. Why now they ſent him to *England.*
Ham. To *England!* wherefore?
Clowne. Why they ſay he ſhall haue his wittes there,
Or if he haue not, t'is no great matter there,
It will not be ſeene there.
Ham. Why not there?
Clowne. Why there they say the men are as mad as he.
Ham. Whose ſcull was this?
Clowne. This, a plague on him, a madde rogues it was,
He powred once a whole flagon of Rheniſh of my head,
Why do not you know him? this was one *Yoricke's* ſcull.
Ham. Was this? I prethee let me ſee it, alas poore *Yoricke*
I knew him Horatio,
A fellow of infinite mirth, he hath caried mee twenty times vpon his backe.

The clown, as he turned up the skull, took it in his hands, saying, "Heres a scull hath bin here this dozen yeare;" he held it during the conversation about "yong *Hamlet*," and Hamlet recalled his attention to it, by saying, "Whose scull *was* this?" "This," says the grave-digger, "why do not you know him? this was one *Yoricke's* scull." "*Was* this?" says Hamlet, "I prethee let me see it;" then the grave-digger hands the skull to Hamlet, and he, regarding it, says, "Alas poore *Yoricke*"

etc. There is no reference to the time of Hamlet's birth.

A change in numbers seems to have been made, without any apparent reason, throughout all the play. In the Second Quarto the player king says:

> Full thirtie times hath *Phebus* cart gone round;

but the First Quarto says:

> Full fortie years are paft.

Hamlet says, in the Second Quarto:

> this three yeeres I haue tooke note of it, the age is growne so picked;

and the First Quarto says:

> This Seauen yeares haue I noted it.

In the conversation with the grave-digger one quarto says:

> hee hath bore me on his backe a thoufand times;

and the other:

> he hath caried me twenty times vpon his backe.

The Second Quarto says:

> Whereon old *Norway* ouercome with ioy,
> Giues him three fcore thoufand crownes in anuall fee.

the First Quarto:

> Giues him three thoufand crownes in annuall fee.

The Folio says:

> I Sir, to be honest as this world goes, is to bee one man pick'd out of two thousand;

and the Second Quarto:

> one man pickt out of tenne thoufand.

The Second Quarto says:

forty thoufand brothers;

and the First Quarto:

twenty brothers.

The First Quarto:

here's a fcull hath bin here this dozen yeare;

and the Second Quarto:

here's a fcull now hath lyen you i'th earth 23. yeeres.

In the Folio this becomes:

this fcul, has laine in the earth three & twenty years.

We can not tell why all these changes were made, nor why the *twelve* in the First Quarto was changed to 23. in the Second. Like the play-wrights of the present day Shakespeare delighted in local allusions: maybe some jester had been dead just three-and-twenty years, and the *twelve* of Q_1 was altered to make a telling hit. It was probably for a like reason that many changes in other plays were made,—*e.g.*, in the Merry Wives, the names Brentford and Reading, in the Quarto, are changed to Reading, Maidenhead, and Colebrook in the Folio. Or there may have been no good actor in the company young enough to represent a beardless boy. It is said that the words—

He's fat, and scant of breath—

were inserted to suit the character to Burbage; if this be true, three-and-twenty may have been inserted for the same reason. Be the reason what it may, the number was altered from twelve to three-

and-twenty, and, from the evidence contained in the play, we may feel sure that it was not so altered for the purpose of fixing Hamlet's age at thirty years. The speeches of the grave-maker can bear two interpretations, but the many allusions in the text, that show Hamlet to be much younger, can be understood in only one way. The weight of evidence is strongly in favor of Hamlet's being a very young man. He first appears in Act I. Scene II. The king and queen, and the courtiers, Hamlet among them, have assembled, probably for the first time since king Hamlet's death, about two months before. The king, after attending to the business of the hour, addresses Hamlet, publicly reproving him for indulging his grief for his father, and commending him in the most patronizing manner, when he consents to remain in Elsinore instead of going back to school in Wittenberg. Both king and queen address Hamlet as if he were a youth yet in tutelage, and not a man. The tone of rebuke and patronage, in the king's speech, would be intolerable to a man of thirty. Claudius would only dare to employ it to

> A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
> An understanding simple and unschool'd;

Hamlet's reply to the queen's request—

> I shall in all my best obey you, madam—

is not the answer made by a man whose love for his mother constrains him to give up his own will to please her, but it is the sullen submission of a youth, who finds his wishes publicly opposed by his legal

guardians, without whose assistance and consent he can not go back to school. Obedience is not the tribute a man of thirty pays his mother. If Hamlet were really a man of those years, he would excite contempt, on this his first appearance, by submitting, as he does, to be so tutored and rebuked by the king and queen. As a youth, we recognize at once that he has no choice but to submit. He has no revenue,—this appears afterward,—and, as the prince who has the voice of the king for his succession, he can not choose his residence, or make one for himself, as a poor subject could. He remains in Elsinore because he must, but thenceforth Denmark appears a prison to him: had he, after this public expression of his mother's will and the king's, insisted on departing, he would have seemed headstrong, rebellious, and disobedient.

In Act III. Scene IV. Hamlet is again represented as very young. This is the scene in which, after the mock-play has given him proofs of the ghost's trustworthiness, he rebukes his mother, and tries to turn her from her guilty love. Polonius has suggested that the queen shall summon Hamlet to her chamber, after the play, and, all alone, entreat him to show his griefs, and has offered, to the king, to act as eaves-dropper. He goes before Hamlet to the queen's closet, and tells her,—

> Look you lay home to him:
> Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
> And that your grace hath screen'd and stood between
> Much heat and him. . . .
> Pray you, be round with him.

She replies:

I'll warrant you,
Fear me not: withdraw, I hear him coming.

"Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with, and that your grace hath screen'd and stood between much heat and him!"—"much heat" displayed by his uncle Claudius! Why should a man of thirty care whether Claudius displayed much heat or little? he would not expect to be disciplined by his uncle, and would need no screening, nor would Polonius dare to dictate to the queen how she should treat a son of thirty years, calling his actions *pranks*.

But the queen herself plainly indicates that her son is young, not only by accepting Polonius's advice, but by her reproof to Hamlet. She is very angry with him; heretofore his insubordination has been shown against the king, and against Polonius, whom she herself dislikes, but to-night, by the mock-play, Hamlet has insulted her, as well as the king, by permitting a performance that criticised their marriage in so open and undisguised a manner. She does not know that Claudius murdered her husband, and she does not know that, on the testimony of the ghost, Hamlet knows her to be an adulteress: she feels that Polonius is justified in saying "his pranks have been too broad to bear with," and she means to reprove him sharply. To her surprise, Hamlet does not come to her closet with the manner of a son expecting deserved reproof; he calls to her impatiently:

Mother, mother, mother!

and, as he enters her presence, he does not wait to hear why he was sent for, but asks:

Now, mother, what's the matter?

This must seem to the queen pure insolence and bravado, but she answers:

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

In this speech she at once rebukes Hamlet, and shows she is prepared to defend her second marriage; but Hamlet, instead of excusing himself, replies to her:

Mother, you have my father much offended.
Queen. Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
Ham. Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.
Queen. Why, how now, Hamlet!

(in the First Quarto, "How now boy?")

Ham. What's the matter now?
Queen. Have you forgot me?
Ham. No, by the rood, not so:
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife;
And—would it were not so!—you are my mother.
Queen. Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak.

With these impatient words, Gertrude moves toward the king's apartments, but Hamlet lays hold on her, and stops her.

Do not Gertrude's words,

Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak,

make it evident that Hamlet is a very young man, little more than a boy? She threatens him with a scolding from his uncle, and expects him to be subdued by dread of it. How puerile if the threat be addressed to a man of thirty!

Other passages in the play that indicate Hamlet's youthfulness are these: Horatio says:

> Let us impart what we have seen to-night
> Unto young Hamlet.—I. i. 169.

The ghost says:

> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood.—I. v. 15.

and again:

> But know, thou noble youth.—I. v. 38.

When Hamlet is about to follow the ghost to a more removed ground, his friends try to prevent his going, not by persuasion only, but by endeavoring forcibly to restrain him. Marcellus says:

> You shall not go, my lord.—I. iv. 79.

and Horatio adds:

> Be ruled; you shall not go.

and Marcellus:

> Let's follow; 'tis not fit thus to obey him.

This indicates rather the obligation they felt to protect their young prince, than anxiety for a comrade of mature age.

Polonius says:

> For Lord Hamlet,
> Believe so much in him, that he is young.—I. iii. 123.

and Laertes, speaking to Ophelia respecting Hamlet, says:

> For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,
> Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
> A violet in the youth of primy nature.—I. iii. 5.

and again:

> For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
> In thews and bulk, but, as this temple waxes,
> The inward service of the mind and soul
> Grows wide withal.

Was not Hamlet really a stripling who must be expected to grow in thews and bulk ere he come to man's estate? Do not his own frequent comparisons of himself with Hercules suggest that he keenly felt the lack of the bodily strength that enabled the latter, in his youth, to do such deeds of valor?

Laertes, who is apparently about the same age as Hamlet, is represented as a young fellow, not yet perfected in the accomplishments of the day. Polonius sends Reynaldo after him into France, with instructions to see how he is behaving himself, and a special injunction:

> And let him ply his music.—II. i. 73.

Laertes was pursuing his studies in France, as Hamlet wanted to do at Wittenberg.

Claudius, speaking to Laertes about the latter's skill in fencing, calls it:

> A very riband in the cap of youth.—IV. vii. 78.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are the schoolfellows of Hamlet,

> being of so young days brought up with him,
> And sith so neighbour'd to his youth and haviour.—II. ii. 11.

do not appear to have been men of mature age. Fortinbras, who was no younger than Hamlet, as his father was killed the day that Hamlet was born, is spoken of by Horatio as—

young Fortinbras,
Of unimproved mettle hot and full.—I. i. 95.

and Claudius twice applies the same adjective, *young*, to him [I. ii. 17; 28]; Hamlet calls him

a delicate and tender prince.—IV. iv. 48.

and even Osric speaks about

Young Fortinbras.

Young Fortinbras is represented as having no revenue and no command: his uncle rebukes him for taking up arms against Denmark, and, when he abandons the idea,

old Norway, overcome with joy,
Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee.—II. ii. 72.

If young Fortinbras was come of age, would not some provision have been already made for him, out of the public revenue? If Hamlet was thirty years old, would not a maintenance have been provided for him, during his father's lifetime, when he attained his majority? Several passages in the play show this was not done. Hamlet says:

And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do, to express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack.—I. v. 184.

I will not sort you with the rest of my servants, for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended.—II. ii. 274.

Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks.—II. ii. 280.

I eat the air, promise-crammed: you cannot feed capons so.—III. ii. 99.

The only passages, except the speech of the sex-

ton, that indicate that Hamlet might have been thirty, are the words of the player-king:

> Full thirty times hath Phœbus' cart gone round.—III. ii. 165.

and the incidental allusion to king Hamlet's age, in the statement:

> *Ham.* His beard was grizzled,—no?
> *Hor.* It was, as I have seen it in his life,
> A sable silver'd.—I. ii. 240.

but this is not worth considering except to note, and cast it aside.

Do you say that this inquiry is a fruitless one,—that it makes no difference whether Hamlet was twenty years old or thirty? The coherence and naturalness of the play depend upon our belief in his youth. We expect greater maturity of judgment, and more self-control, in a man than in a boy. A youth of twenty, to whom sorrow was a stranger, would bear his grief at his father's death, and his mother's hasty marriage, differently from a man of mature years. A youth in his nonage must, perforce, submit to see his uncle pop in between the election and his hopes, and fortify his claim to the throne by a marriage with the imperial jointress, who might otherwise be regent until her son was come of age; but an ambitious man, who was "loved of the distracted multitude," would not indolently allow himself to be thus forced aside.

A man of thirty would have sufficient experience of life to know that purity might still exist in womankind, even though his own mother proved criminal: he would not feel that her lapse in virtue proved that all other women were vulnerable. This

is the judgment of a very young man, who loves for the first time. A man of thirty, who was called upon to revenge his father's murder, would not think it necessary to feign madness to cover his design and make it fruitful: he would make no change in his daily life, he would do nothing to excite suspicion; he would secretly lay his plans, and, when they were ripe, he would try to execute them. Hamlet, by his assumption of madness, exposes himself to espionage and to confinement, either of which is likely to defeat his ends. Admitting that a mature mind would adopt the screen of pretended madness, the disguise would be consistently kept up—there would be no explanation to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "I am but mad north-north-west."

Hamlet's submission to his own exile, without a word of expostulation, proves that he was young and almost friendless at the court. A man of thirty would have made influential friends, who would demand an explanation from the king when their prince was spirited away. The isolation in which Hamlet lived was not the result of his own desire for solitude, but of his youth. We know this from the eagerness with which he welcomed Horatio and his two school-fellows. The friends of his childhood—friends that he had made before he went to Wittenberg—were too young to have any influence or standing at the court, and Hamlet on his return thither found himself alone. Claudius's allusion to

> the great love the general gender bear him,

proves, rather .than disproves this. The "general gender" had been accustomed to think of Hamlet as their future king, and they loved him for what he was, and what they hoped he should become.

The bearing of Hamlet to the sentinels and Horatio (I. v. 116) indicates his youth. He had left them to go with the ghost, and it was natural to suppose that he would make known to them whatever passed out of their sight and hearing,—the ghost had appeared first to them. They followed Hamlet, and came upon him before he had decided how much he should impart to them: he meant to keep the revelation secret, but he lacked *savoir faire.* A man would have told them, at once, that he had heard what he could not reveal. Knowing that the secret was his only, he would not hesitate to deny them knowledge of it, and impose secrecy upon them; but Hamlet, not knowing how to deal with the subject, tried to joke their inquiries aside. Coleridge says, "The terrible, by a law of the human mind, always touches on the verge of the ludicrous." Hamlet is so excited and overwrought that sober words can neither express nor conceal his feelings, and he attempts, by flippancy, to impose not only on his hearers, but on himself. By deriding and minifying the source of his emotion, he hopes to persuade himself, as well as his friends, that he is unduly moved; that a legitimate cause for such intense agitation does not exist. On how many other occasions have the most solemn and sorrowful emotions been expressed by a burst of hysteri-

cal laughter,—Nature's revenge when the relief of tears is denied her.*

"Hamlet ridicules the ghost; calls him "old mole," "truepenny," "worthy pioner," "this fellow in the cellarage;" but he can not make himself believe that the voice he hears is not his father's. His only defense against his companions' curiosity is mocking speech, and finally irritated denial. His youthful irritability shows in contrast to Horatio's grave assertion of his own dignity; Horatio is hurt by Hamlet's brusqueness, and he reminds the prince:

> These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

Hamlet says:

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* In confirmation of this idea, I quote from *Kean and the Elder Booth*, edited by Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton. In this work, Edwin Booth, writing of his father, says: "Great minds to madness closely are allied. Hamlet's mind, at the very edge of frenzy, seeks its relief in ribaldry. For a like reason would my father open, so to speak, the safety-valve of levity in some of his most impassioned moments. At the instant of intense emotion, when the spectators were enthralled by its magnetic influence, the tragedian's overwrought brain would take refuge from its own threatening storm beneath the jester's hood, and while turned from the audience he would whisper some silliness or 'make a face.' When he left the stage, however, no allusion to such seeming frivolity was permitted. His fellow-actors who perceived these trivialities ignorantly attributed his conduct at such times to lack of feeling, whereas it was the extreme excess of feeling which thus forced his brain back from the verge of madness. Only those who have known the torture of severe mental tension can appreciate the value of that one little step from the sublime to the ridiculous."

I'm sorry they offend you, heartily;
Yes 'faith, heartily.
Hor. There's no offence, my lord.
Ham. Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you:
For your desire to know what is between us,
O'ermaster 't as you may.—I. v. 133.

A man of the world would have known how to turn aside the inquiries of his friends, without so plainly indicating that he was doing so.

In Act V. Scene II. we see another indication of Hamlet's youth, in the manner in which he receives Osric when he brings him the challenge to the proposed fencing match. Hamlet is engaged in serious talk with Horatio when "this water-fly" interrupts them: he receives him gravely enough, but in a moment yields to the temptation to chaff him. To an older man there would have been no temptation. A Hamlet of thirty might have told Osric to make his speech intelligible, but he would not have attempted to lay down counter for counter with him, until his purse was empty, and all his golden words were spent. The fencing with Laertes was not a proof of youth, but this silly bantering of Osric was. Hamlet accepted the challenge, not from vanity, but because it offered him a means to be reconciled to Laertes, and was an opportunity to "court his favours" that Hamlet—true gentleman that he was—was only too happy to embrace.

The testimony of the grave-digger as to Hamlet's age, it seems to me, should be set aside; the play indicates his youth so clearly, in so many places,

that it would be perverse to insist on thirty as the number of his years. For the maturity of his thoughts, which seem those of a much older man, the poet must be held accountable. It is Shakespeare who thinks, not Hamlet. Shakespeare loves a young man. Many of his heroes are as young, or younger. Orlando had not grown a beard, nor had Troilus nor Adonis: Bertram, in All's Well, was the king's ward, too young to go to the Florentine war: Florizel looked twenty-one, but may have been younger: the two boys, Cadwal and Polydore, were twenty and twenty-three; and Posthumus was very young. Shakespeare does not represent any of these youths with so mature a mind as Hamlet's, but his precocity is not experience of men or things, it is exhibited chiefly in imaginative speculation upon life and death: it would not surprise us to find all that seems precocious in him, attributed as natural to several of Shakespeare's female characters,—to Helen, in All's Well, and Marina, daughter to Pericles, for instance.

The play becomes much more pathetic and beautiful when we perceive that Hamlet, a young man on whom all his coming years should smile, is, in their spring, ruthlessly despoiled of all the hopes and illusions that usually accompany and glorify that age. The blows that shatter his ideals come from his father and his mother, who should be his shield against the world: there is imposed on him a task from which the maturest mind might shrink, and we love and pity him, as he makes his brave fight, *because* he is so young.

My judgment is that Hamlet was not twenty-one. I have set down the ground on which I form it, and to them I add, that in the *Hystorie*, p. 290 and elsewhere, it is expressly stated that he had not come to man's estate.

V.

HAVING arrived at a conclusion about Hamlet's age—or youth,—let us consider carefully what was his state of mind, and what the conditions that surrounded him at the beginning of the play. The first scene informs us that Denmark, under a new king, is in hasty preparation for an attack young Fortinbras intends to make on it: we hear that he desires to wrest from the kingdom certain lands that were won from his father in single combat by the late king Hamlet. Our young prince of course should feel a special interest in the proposed invasion of Danish soil, but we are not told that he does, nor from the first scene do we learn anything about his state of mind or body. The second scene, however, exposes Hamlet's mental condition. On its opening we see Hamlet for the first time; we see him melancholy to such an extent that he thinks he desires to die. His father's death, which occurred not quite two months before, was not the chief or only cause for his unhappiness. Hamlet had been recalled from Wittenberg to attend his father's funeral: the late king had been embalmed, and his sepulture delayed until his son—his only child—arrived. The messenger who was sent to tell Hamlet of his father's death occupied many days on his journey, as did Hamlet on his return to Elsinore.

The double journey to and from Wittenberg must have consumed nearly a month. (The ambassadors Claudius sends to Norway are represented as requiring full two months for their journey thither and back.) Hamlet loved his father passionately and devotedly, his grief at his death was poignant and sincere; but on the weary journey home from Wittenberg, he had full time to moderate the expression of his sorrow, and to adjust himself to his new life as he supposed it lay before him. He expected, when he reached Elsinore, to be welcomed as the king; his uncle or his mother might be regent for a year or two, but he prepared to bear himself right kingly, and the sense of his duties and responsibilities helped to control and dissipate the first passion of grief for his father's death. When he reached Denmark his sorrow was augmented, and mingled with it was the knowledge that he had been cheated and despoiled.

He found that his uncle had "popped in between the election and his hopes," and that he—Claudius—was now king of Denmark,—the royal Dane. Joined to Hamlet's sense of humiliation and defeat was the feeling that the *manes* of his father had been dishonored when his son was thrust aside from the succession. The throne of Denmark was elective, and Claudius filled it by the will of the people; but Hamlet felt that the election had been secured by chicanery and fraud, and he was very sore. The *Hystorie* (p. 323) represents Hamlet as claiming the throne as his inheritance, and declaring himself the lawful successor of his father. He could better have

borne his doubled sorrow had he seen reason to hope that his uncle might be deposed. If his mother would unite with him in disputing Claudius's title to the throne, Hamlet might expect so to press his claims that they would be acknowledged. But Hamlet found his mother arrayed against him, joined to the party of his enemies,—joined by a tie closer even than that which bound her to him; she was now one flesh with the usurper, married to him before the shoes were old in which she followed her first husband to the grave. Hamlet then, when the play opens, has lost not only his father, but his mother and his kingdom, and, in this second scene, he is forbidden even the poor consolation of absenting himself from the spot where everything reminds him of his loss. The constraint put upon him is made doubly bitter by the ease with which Laertes obtains permission to return to France to his studies. We do not know what Claudius's design was in keeping Hamlet in Elsinore; it may be he had already determined to make his seat secure by compassing Hamlet's death. In the *Hystorie* (p. 239) Hamlet reproaches his mother because she did not find means to save her child "by sending him into Swethland, Norway, or England, rather then to leaue him as a pray to youre infamous adulterer."

At the end of this second scene, in which Hamlet has made plain his animosity toward Claudius, his First Soliloquy makes clear to us his feeling toward his mother, and his weariness of the world, as he now finds it. His words are:

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month:
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

In speaking this soliloquy an actor might help his audience to understand that Hamlet believes himself unlawfully extruded from the throne. On the exit of the court let him indignantly rush to the seat that Claudius had occupied as though to take

possession of it, and, stopping short, seem to restrain himself because of the image of his father seated there, which his imagination brings before him. Let him draw forth the portrait of his father, and compare it with the picture in his mind's eye, and then, turning away, prostrated by grief, begin the soliloquy.

The first words of this soliloquy, as it is now rendered, are:

> O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!

This is the reading of the First Folio, but the First Quarto reads:

> O that this too much grieu'd and fallied flefh
> Would melt to nothing, or that the vniuerfall
> Globe of heauen would turne al to a Chaos!

In the Second Quarto this becomes:

> O that this too too fallied flefh would melt,
> Thaw and refolfue it selfe into a dewe,
> Or that the euerlafting had not fixt
> His cannon gainſt feale flaughter.

According to Stratmann (who, however, makes many mistakes and omissions), all the editions preceding the Folio of 1623—the First Folio—have "too too sallied flesh." I think this reading should be restored, unless we go further and adopt the reading of the First Quarto. Its words show the meaning of the line, and "too much grieved and sallied flesh" is as much more elegant and dignified than "too too sallied flesh," as this surpasses in ex-

pressiveness and beauty the "too too solid" of our modern editions. Hamlet felt that he was grieved and assailed on every side; the obligation to remain in Elsinore was a new blow. *Sallied* is an adjective made from the noun *sally*, and has a kindred meaning with *attacked*, made from the noun *attack*. Hamlet, because he felt that he was too much grieved (or wounded) and assailed to endure his misery, wished that his too too sallied flesh—his bodily frame—would melt and let loose the imprisoned soul; and, in expressing this wish in these words he confides to us the reason why he wishes it, while this reason is not conveyed by the modern reading.

I wish to direct attention to the fact that while Hamlet believes that he would gladly be relieved of life, he recognizes that the way to happiness through death is barred by the canon which the Everlasting has fixed 'gainst self-slaughter: he wishes for death, but he does not now, nor at any future time, contemplate seeking it by suicide, or against the will of his Heavenly Father. Submission to lawful authority is the rule of Hamlet's life. His disgust at his mother's conduct is intense, but obedience to parents is so fixed a principle with him that he submits, without a word of remonstrance, when Gertrude's second marriage settles his future life. In this First Soliloquy he does not manifest any personal feeling because of his mother's desertion of himself, but all his reproaches are aimed at her because she could so soon forget a husband like his father, and replace him by his uncle. It is rather a

trick with Hamlet to formulate his conclusions—the result of his reflections, and he does so in this soliloquy in the words, "Frailty, thy name is woman." He does not yet know that his mother was false during his father's lifetime, but his judgment from her conduct as he sees it is, "Frailty, thy name is" —not Gertrude, but—"woman!" He argues from one to all, and all womankind he draws sweepstake in his conclusion: this judgment afterward influences his decision as to Ophelia's ability to resist temptation.

Hamlet is interrupted in his soliloquy by Horatio, who comes, with the two sentinels, to tell him that for the past three nights, what seems to be his father's spirit has appeared on the platform where they watched. Hamlet greets Horatio with affection, and a display of sincere friendship and intimacy. Although his friend must have been at least a month in Elsinore, having come thither to the late king's funeral, Hamlet has not seen him nor heard of his presence there: this lack of knowledge indicates how entirely he has separated himself from the court and submitted to the hopeless sadness that shut down upon him when he returned to Denmark. Ophelia has probably been his only companion; in her society he could for a while forget his grief, and he indulged himself in the comfort of her presence until he had won her love and awakened a responsive passion in his own breast.

After questioning Horatio and his two friends calmly and with coherence of thought and speech, Hamlet decides to join them in their watch that

night, hoping, he knows not what. On his return to Denmark he had been told the story of his father's death, but had given it only half belief. He saw that godlike body

> bark'd about,
> Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust.

and the story that a serpent's sting had produced so remarkable an effect has proved incredible. He doubts some foul play, but in what particular thought to act he knows not. Now the intelligence that his father's spirit is in arms encourages him to hope that aid may come to him from the other world. His faith in the eternal justice is so strong that he believes,

> foul deeds will rise,
> Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

Thus, at the end of the second scene, we see that Hamlet is aroused from his lethargy, and, impatient for the coming of the night, is already cherishing a hope that his condition may be changed.

VI.

IMMEDIATELY after Hamlet has expressed his intention that night to question the apparition should it again assume the appearance of his father, but before the hour has arrived for him to do so, Ophelia is introduced to us. It is the poet's wisdom that shows us Hamlet's feeling against his mother before the interview with the ghost. It is also his wisdom that makes Scene III.—the parting of Laertes from Ophelia and Polonius—precede the revelation of Gertrude's guilt, and Hamlet's consequent determination to renounce Ophelia.

From the moral training that Polonius would give his daughter there could scarcely result a pure-minded, high-principled, self-controlling character. The precepts that he parroted over to Laertes were mere echoes of other people's morality; his real nature, and his views on the subject of youthful education, are shown in Act II. Scene I. when he gives Reynaldo his instructions as to the means he shall employ to discover how Laertes is behaving himself in France, The instructions are these:

Pol. Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.
Rey. I will, my lord.
Pol. You shall do marvellous wisely, good Reynaldo,
Before you visit him, to make inquire
Of his behaviour.
Rey. My lord, I did intend it.

Pol. Marry, well said; very well said. Look you, sir,
Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris;
And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,
What company, at what expense; and finding
By this encompassment and drift of question
That they do know my son, come you more nearer
Than your particular demands will touch it:
Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him;
As thus, 'I know his father and his friends,
And in part him:' do you mark this, Reynaldo?
Rey. Ay, very well, my lord.
Pol. 'And in part him; but' you may say 'not well:
But, if't be he I mean, he's very wild;
Addicted so and so:' and there put on him
What forgeries you please; marry, none so rank
As may dishonour him; take heed of that;
But, sir, such wanton, wild and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty.
Rey. As gaming, my lord.
Pol. Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling,
Drabbing: you may go so far.
Rey. My lord, that would dishonour him
Pol. 'Faith, no; as you may season it in the charge.
You must not put another scandal on him,
That he is open to incontinency;
That's not my meaning: but breathe his faults so quaintly
That they may seem the taints of liberty,
The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
A savageness in unreclaimed blood,
Of general assault.
Rey. But, my good lord,—
Pol. Wherefore should you do this?
Rey. Ay, my lord,
I would know that.
Pol. Marry, sir, here's my drift;
And, I believe, it is a fetch of wit:
You laying these slight sullies on my son,

As 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' the working,
Mark you,
Your party in converse, him you would sound,
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured
He closes with you in this consequence;
'Good sir,' or so, or 'friend,' or 'gentleman,'
According to the phrase or the addition
Of man and country.

Rey. Very good, my lord.

Pol. And then, sir, does he this—he does—what was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to say something: where did I leave?

Rey. At 'closes in the consequence,' at 'friend or so,' and 'gentleman.'

Pol. At 'closes in the consequence,' ay, marry;
He closes thus: 'I know the gentleman;
I saw him yesterday, or t'other day,
Or then, or then; with such or such; and, as you say,
There was a' gaming; there o'ertook in's rouse;
There falling out at tennis:' or perchance,
'I saw him enter such a house of sale,'
Videlicet, a brothel, or so forth.
See you now;
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth:
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out:
So by my former lecture and advice,
Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

Rey. My lord, I have.

Pol. God be wi' you; fare you well.

Rey. Good my lord!

Pol. Observe his inclination in yourself.

Rey. I shall, my lord.

Pol. And let him ply his music.

Rey. Well, my lord.

Pol. Farewell!

From a father who entertains such broad ideas as to what would dishonor his son, Ophelia has received her moral training. She has grown to womanhood without a mother's tender care and guidance, and never has been taught either to control her impulses, or to know the danger that would result from the indulgence of them. We see her first in the third scene, unless, indeed, she was present with the other ladies of the court in the preceding scene. Shakespeare seems especially to present Ophelia now, so that we may know the ground for Hamlet's decision, when, that same night, after the revelation of the ghost, the suspicion of her possible frailty presents itself to him.

Her brother, who fondly loves her, is parting from her to go to France: he has bidden her farewell, but he lingers to caution her against the entertainment of Hamlet's love,—first, because Hamlet may change; and second, because his station may make it difficult for him to choose as he would. But Laertes goes further still; he cautions her against herself; he bids her—

> Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain,
> If with too credent ear you list his songs,
> Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
> To his unmaster'd importunity.
> Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
> And keep you in the rear of your affection,
> Out of the shot and danger of desire.
> . . . . best safety lies in fear:
> Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

Ophelia, who is always obedient and pliant, answers to this:

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,
As watchman to my heart.

but her answer does not end here: the rest is either impudent, or shows the extreme of innocence; it certainly is not the reply we should expect a chaste, pure-minded, self-restraining maid to make; it is not the answer that Miranda in like circumstances, or Marina, would have made:

But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

Ophelia manifests that hers was a nature for which the primrose path of dalliance had strong attractions. This is plainly indicated by Laertes's speech, and her reply to it, and by her father's succeeding caution.

Ophelia's words, in this scene, should be so rendered as absolutely to disclose her disposition to the audience. Her first reply to Laertes—*No more but so?*—should be given with no touch of sadness or of belief in his estimate of Hamlet's favors, but rather with an airy confidence resulting from the reflection that her brother does not know, as she does, that Hamlet has importuned her with love in honorable fashion. This confidence should animate her all through the conversation with Laertes, and should continue through the conversation with her father, until he commands her to break off all intercourse with the prince: then she should show the grief she feels at such a harsh and, as she believes, unnecessary command.

Polonius's cautions are evoked by some words in Laertes's farewell to Ophelia, and he asks:

Pol. What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?
Oph. So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.
Pol. Marry, well bethought:
'Tis told me, he hath very oft of late
Given private time to you; and you yourself
Have of your audience been most free and bounteous:
If it be so, as so 'tis put on me,
And that in way of caution, I must tell you,
You do not understand yourself so clearly
As it behoves my daughter and your honour.
What is between you? give me up the truth.
Oph. He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
Of his affection to me.
Pol. Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?
Oph. I do not know, my lord, what I should think.
Pol. Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby;
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;
Or — not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus—you'll tender me a fool.
Oph. My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable fashion.
Pol. Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.
Oph. And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.
Pol. Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows: these blazes, daughter,
Giving more light than heat, extinct in both,
Even in their promise, as it is a-making,
You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence;
Set your entreatments at a higher rate

Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him, that he is young,
And with a larger tether may he walk
Than may be given to you: in few, Ophelia,
Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk to the lord Hamlet.
Look to 't, I charge you: come your ways.
Oph. I shall obey, my lord.

In this scene Ophelia is cautioned, first by her brother, and then by her father, not only to doubt the integrity of Hamlet's professions of love, but to restrain her own desires, and to guard her honor. Had Polonius or Laertes appreciated the absolute uprightness of Hamlet's character, these warnings would have remained unuttered, but they both judge him by what themselves are capable of. They do not suppose that the prince is contemplating marriage—such an ending to the love-story they gladly would accomplish—but they fear that he may tempt the maiden, and *they fear that she will not resist.* Polonius speaks with much warmth, telling Ophelia that people have observed her lack of maidenly reserve, and have cautioned him in reference to the danger there might be to her in such close intimacy with Hamlet. Have her father and Laertes such a knowledge of Ophelia's disposition that they know this warning to be needed? It is a strong measure absolutely to forbid a young

maid to "give words or talk with" a lover, unless he be a libertine. Do they fear Ophelia will melt in her own fire? At any rate they doubt the ability of her virtue to resist assault, and "others" have conceived the same doubts: she is innocent, but her innocence is the innocence of unassailed ignorance and not of principle. This is the view of Ophelia's character which is first presented to us by the poet: we see her ability to resist temptation doubted by those who know her best, and by others. We see that her very obedience and pliability expose her to danger: she should have made a braver fight for her lover, and repelled the insinuations of her father and her brother—they should have been intolerable to her, not only on her own account but on his.

We shall be constrained to believe, as we examine the play, that, in Ophelia, Shakespeare has reproduced the "faire and beawtifull woman" of the *Hystorie* who was set to entice Hamlet. She was a gentlewoman who "from her infancy loved and favored" Hamlet, and who now loved him "more than herself." Exactly such a character as the *Hystorie* discloses we could not cover with even the broad mantle of charity; therefore Shakespeare alters and modifies it, depicting Ophelia as an innocent maiden who was truly described by Goethe in these words:*

"Her whole existence flows in sweet and ripe sensation. Her attachment to the Prince, to whose hand she may aspire, flows so spontaneously, her

* *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, p. 228. Translated by R. Dillon Boylan. London 1870.

affectionate heart yields so completely to its impulse, that both her father and brother are afraid, and both give her plain and direct warning of her danger. Decorum, like the thin crape upon her bosom, can not conceal the motions of her heart, but on the contrary it betrays them. Her imagination is engaged, her silent modesty breathes a sweet desire, and if the convenient goddess Opportunity should shake the tree, the fruit would quickly fall."

The censure of Polonius and Laertes, while it seems harsh, is not unnecessary. Ophelia is so truly innocent and unconscious, that even the cause of her own sensations is not recognized by her; she knows that all the currents of her being set to Hamlet, but she recognizes nothing of the danger involved in being carried onward by them. In Hamlet's presence, and with him, she delights to tread "the primrose path of dalliance." This Hamlet knows, and the knowledge leads him afterward to condemn her for a fault that he, and he only, had tempted her to commit.

All our sympathies enwrap Ophelia when we see her repudiated and disowned by a lover whom she does not know that she has ever offended. This double strain in the tragedy—Hamlet condemning before it is proven that condemnation is necessary, and Ophelia suffering for a fault she does not know she has committed—gives to the present view of the play its special charm. From Hamlet's point of view we agree with him, and justify him in his decision to renounce his love. We admit, when he reminds us of it, that by a maiden's behavior before marriage we can foretell and determine her de-

meanor after it; we agree in thinking that reserve and self-control are necessary qualities in a girl who is to make a faithful, self-respecting wife.

But when Ophelia discloses her deep and true affection, supposing that she is revealing only that of .Hamlet, we see it is nature and not depravity that speaks. We long to tell the maid what her dead mother would have told her. We weep in spirit when we see her agony at the belief that, by her absolute obedience to her father's harsh command, she has dethroned Hamlet's "noble and most sovereign reason." We mourn over the sorrow these two young souls endure: how gladly would we use our knowledge of them both to make the truth clear to their wounded hearts. Shakespeare puts us in this position, where we can hear and justify both sides. We are the gods who sit above the clouds, longing to help, but knowing that a clumsy interfering touch will disarrange more than it would relieve. We see the cross-purposes with which the play abounds; the irony of Fate is made clear to us; we realize that it is from the lessons of the queen that Hamlet has constructed his ideal of womanly virtue, and we know the horrid truth, that these lessons were given with the hope that by preaching purity she would be esteemed to practice it. Even for those who have not gained our clearer insight the story has a boundless charm; for us it is the play of plays: every light cast upon it reveals a new beauty. It is the picture of the life we live or that is lived beside us every hour.

Shakespeare, then, showed us Ophelia, and let her

disclose her disposition to us thus early in the play, so that we might not absolutely rebel when inexorable faithfulness to his own ideal made Hamlet determine to tear his love for her out of his heart, and to separate her from his life; this he does on the night of the same day that the gentle maiden is introduced to us.

VII.

IN the fourth scene of the first act Hamlet goes to the platform to await the appearance of the ghost. As this is not a eulogy but an exposition of Shakespeare, I shall not now, nor as we advance, direct attention to, or speak in admiration of, any of the manifold beauties of the play: I am not more capable to discover and appreciate these than my reader. Nor shall I step aside to allude to the interpretations that have been put by critics on certain phrases or situations, unless it be absolutely necessary to the unfolding of the story. While I believe that the student who for the first time compares the original editions with our modern edition will be struck by many manifestly corrupt readings, yet this is not an examination of the text of *Hamlet*, but of the story; and I mean to confine myself to pointing out what the story is that the text expounds, passing quickly from points that need no explication, and repeating, again and again, what I believe to be the explanation of passages of confused or doubtful meaning.

Hamlet, then, waits on the platform, with his friends, for the appearance of the ghost. He is not nervous or apprehensive, he is even cheerful, he has his nerves and mental forces so under control that he can chat with Horatio about the bad habits of his

uncle, and put his moralizings on the subject into a didactic, epigrammatic form. The truth is, he does not thoroughly believe the ghost story; he is not on the *qui vive*, and the apparition enters unseen by him. His first words, when Horatio calls his attention to it, show that the majesty of the ghost's appearance and its resemblance to his father have surprised him. Little by little he lets belief take hold on him, until at last he calls the apparition—"Hamlet, King, Father, Royal Dane," but to this invocation the ghost is dumb. Hamlet's interest and excitement grow so intense that he breaks away from his friends, who would forcibly restrain him, and, following the ghost, he leaves the scene with it. Alone with the spirit, dread takes hold on him, and he stops, fearing it may indeed be a "goblin damn'd" who is leading him to destruction.

Ham. Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further.
Ghost. Mark me.
Ham. I will.
Ghost. My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.
Ham. Alas, poor ghost!
Ghost. Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.
Ham. Speak; I am bound to hear.
Ghost. So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.
Ham. What?
Ghost. I am thy father's spirit, etc.

Hamlet's answers, when the ghost first speaks, show that the critical faculty is aroused in him, and that he intends to weigh whatever he may hear, and

decide, with the help of his reason, whether the spirit comes with "intents wicked or charitable." After the first replies, which suggest an incredulity that is rebuked by the ghost in the words,—

> So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear,—

Hamlet listens, without any interruption, except an occasional exclamation, until the ghost announces:

> The serpent that did sting thy father's life
> Now wears his crown.

Then the belief that has been growing in Hamlet is confirmed, and his pent-up excitement is relieved, by the cry:

> O my prophetic soul!
> My uncle!

He has been told something that he wishes to believe, and he fully credits it, as also all the succeeding revelations.

The apparition of the late king describes the circumstances of his taking off, having first impressed upon Hamlet the duty to avenge his murder. As the revelation proceeds, and the story of Gertrude's alienation from her husband and of her falseness is presented to Hamlet, the ghost seems to feel that Claudius had wrought a greater crime when he won Gertrude to his shameful lust, than when he secured the crown by murdering his brother. And so, in truth, he had, for he had destroyed the immortal part of Gertrude—her virtue—while the king he had but deprived of life.

The revenge which the ghost desires Hamlet to procure is not to be obtained by wrenching the

crown from the usurper's grasp, or by his death. To the late king the crown is but a bauble when compared with the love of his most seeming-virtuous queen. The injunction laid on Hamlet is:

> Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damned incest.

His task was not alone to be the killing of the king, but the weaning of the queen from her guilty affection for him. The ghost is most particular in this, and his feeling against his brother is manifested chiefly because he had debauched the queen. He is called

> That incestuous, that adulterate beast,

not "that murderer." The ghost assumes that the queen was subdued to a power which she could not successfully struggle against. The "witchcraft" of Claudius's wit was too strong for her to resist it, therefore her husband's love for her is not destroyed, and he cautions Hamlet—

> But, howsoever thou pursuest this act

(the act being that by which he should purify the royal bed of Denmark),—

> Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven
> And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
> To prick and sting her.

The ghost feels this to be a necessary caution; he fears that Hamlet will be more incensed against his mother than against his uncle, and he tries to protect his dearly loved Gertrude from the possible results of her son's judgment of her. (When he again appears to Hamlet in the queen's closet, he

makes a like effort to protect and comfort her.) The ghost is wise in laying this injunction on Hamlet; without it, Gertrude would have been the first object on which his righteous wrath would expend itself.

I think it is not right to represent Hamlet—as so many actors do—as terrorized on the first appearance of the ghost. He has come to the platform prepared to see a something in his father's form and semblance; he has expressed the determination,—

> If it assume my noble father's person,
> I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape
> And bid me hold my peace;

and, when the ghost appears, he does question it, not hurriedly or fearfully, but with deep awe, tempered with affection and pity. Hamlet's lines give no indication of fear or hesitation, until after he has followed the apparition to a more remote part of the platform; then, indeed, he says:

> Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further.

But this seems only caution, not fear. Why should he fear? his friends have thrice before encountered the dread shape, and have escaped unhurt, and his loving father would be no less tender towards him than them. If fear take possession of the human breast it leaves no room for any other sensations; but Hamlet manifested sympathy, pity, indignation, hatred, and disgust. These feelings animate and sway him; he is intensely agitated and excited, but I think he feels no fear. On the stage, during the latter part of the revelation, Hamlet should control

the manifestation of every feeling, except when a wave of tender affection sweeping over him bears him nearer to his beloved father. On the departure of the apparition he should still be controlled by the awe with which its presence had inspired him. It should press on him like a weight, and should help to bow his knees to a sudden collapse when he asks, *And shall I couple?* From that point, as he controls his bodily weakness, he emancipates himself from the sway of the feeling that had governed him in the presence of the apparition, and continues free from it until the repeated—*Swear*—from beneath the platform, again subjects him to its dominion. It is awe that inspires Hamlet's answer to Horatio:

> And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

And—

> Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!

is the prayer of an awe-stricken soul.

To the sad farewell of the apparition—

> Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me—

Hamlet returns no answer. He is lost in contemplation of the change its revelation has already made in his duties and responsibilities. His relation to the universe has suddenly been changed; he is not now a sufferer only—the football of the gods—he has been constituted an avenger. His first words after the departure of the spirit do not express tender commiseration of his father's wrongs, nor a vow to avenge them, nor filial love trying to alleviate them: the ghost for a moment is a second-

ary consideration, and Hamlet thinks only of himself, and contemplates his future life. His first words are an appeal to the hosts of heaven. He does not expect thence any instant help to bear the dreadful revelation, but it is our impulse to turn in trouble toward something stable and eternal, not changeable by the accidents of life. Hamlet exclaims:

O all you host of heaven! O earth!

and then he thinks: My father is murdered, my mother is estranged, my crown is usurped; I have neither father, nor mother, nor home. What else? what else can I be deprived of? Into his mind comes the remembrance of Ophelia, and, for a moment, he believes he can take sanctuary near the altar of their mutual love. But quickly he considers whether he is indeed secure of her affection. He recalls his old idea of the queen, and, picturing Ophelia to himself, recalling the freedom with which she has returned his demonstrations of affection, he instantly determines that she is no better, no purer by nature, than his mother. With grim cynicism he perceives that a celibate life will deprive outrageous fortune of one of the arrows she might aim against him, as she had employed it against his father, and he almost laughs, with a sardonic joy, as he makes his judgment of Ophelia, and exclaims:

And shall I couple? Hell! *

* The use of this word is suggested by the *Hystorie* (p. 298), in a strongly elaborated sentence. The verb is used several times in the *Hystorie*, e. g., pp. 288, 331.

This judgment shuts out the last ray of light from a life already darkened by clouds of sorrows; what wonder that soul and body tremble under the deprivation. He is a brave man, who, if his eye offend him, can pluck it out and cast it from him: Hamlet tore out the very heart from his bosom; what wonder then that the loss unnerved him! But it was only for a moment; beginning to recover command of his mental parts, he exclaims—"O, fie!" in reprehension of his bodily weakness.

> O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up.

Then follows:

> Remember thee!
> Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe.

How could he but remember, when their conditions, as it seemed, were so parallel—both deprived of their heart's idol, and by her own unworthiness.

> Remember thee!
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
> That youth and observation copied there;
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!

Then he pauses a moment, and is again aroused to invective by the recollection that it is his mother who is the cause of all his misery. Had she been true his father might have lived, for Claudius would

have lacked the chief incentive to his crime. He sees that it is his mother's wickedness, and weakness under temptation, that has dethroned his ideal of womanly purity, and set in motion all the engines that have destroyed his hopes for happiness. His wrath is directed to her first, before it touches Claudius. Claudius is but an instrument. He exclaims:

> O most pernicious woman!

"most pernicious" if she can so blast the lives of father and of son. Then he remembers that without temptation she would have remained as pure as she once seemed to be, and he cries out:

> O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
> My tables,—meet it is I set it down,
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
> At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark.—

then he writes.

Although neither the Quartos nor the First Folio gives the direction found in the modern editions—*Writing*—I do not believe that Hamlet merely jabs the point of his stylet into the tables. He has just determined to make his memory a blank, so that his father's commandment may live there all alone, and he can not therefore commit this reflection to its charge—he must set it down—and he does so, he inscribes something; not those very words, it may be, but something german to the subject, for he says:

> So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;
> It is 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'
> I have sworn't.

This writing was an ordinary every-day act to which Hamlet was accustomed in that other world where ghosts were strangers, and it let his nerves down from their extreme tension; it was a break that allowed him to reply with an assumption of calmness to the calls of his companions. This calmness he could not maintain consistently under their questionings, but as we have already considered his fencing with their inquiries, and the reasons for it, we need not again advert to it, except to say that a sober realization that his murdered father had returned to purgatorial fires would then have unsettled Hamlet's reason. He put the conviction aside and tried by mockery to conceal, from his companions and himself, the depth of his emotion. The solemn *Swear*, from beneath their feet, was not needed only to convince Horatio and the others that the ghost had voice as well as motion, but it gave Hamlet an instant's hope. The ghost had said:

> My hour is almost come,
> When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
> Must render up myself.

and the revelation had been cut short because the dawn approached. This tarrying and echoing of Hamlet's voice allowed him to ignore the belief that his beloved father was a sufferer, and to postpone the sympathetic commiseration of his agony. It was many weeks before he arrived at the fixed conclusion that this spirit, that "had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors," was his revered father, and this interval of oscillation between doubt and belief was the salvation of Hamlet's reason.

But, at the instant that he heard the revelation, he accepted the obligation to obey the ghost's command, and from that moment we see his office in the play. Hamlet is the Avenger.

The crime he has to punish, the object he has to attain, is a double one: he must kill the king, and restore his mother to her former allegiance to his dead father. This Hamlet resolved to do. His father's injunction was:

> If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
> Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damned incest.

[Remove my brother from your mother's bed, and from her heart.]

The command to kill that brother was not so explicit; it was included in the command:

> If thou didst ever thy dear father love—
> Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Both of these tasks, and a third one also, Hamlet resolved to execute: he determined to separate himself from Ophelia. Not because he had the former tasks to perform, but because he had convinced himself that a union with her would expose him to the same unhappiness his father had endured, and possibly compel him, in his turn, to burden a son with the same obligation that he must now labor to fulfill. He resolved to renounce Ophelia now, in order to secure his own future peace of mind; he resolved to win Gertrude back to her lawful allegiance in order to secure the quiet repose of his father's spirit. This was his task. Never was son given a more dif-

ficult one; his very son-ship made it the more impossible. A stranger who was not under filial obligation might have set about it forthwith, but Hamlet delayed action for two months, unable to devise a scheme by which to effect his mother's restoration to moral purity, and while he thus delayed he was "torn by conflicting doubts,"

In the old *Hystorie*, Hamblet never knows that his mother was false to his father during his life-time. Hamblet was there prompted to kill his uncle only by the natural sentiments of ambition and revenge. When Shakespeare introduced the ghost, and allowed it to reveal Gertrude's unfaithfulness, he altered Hamlet's relation to the crime he had to punish. It was no longer the injury done to his father and himself, by the murder and assumption of the crown, that he was required to revenge, but he was expected to right a wrong that he could not prove had been committed. This was more difficult than to prove a murder when no dead body has been found. When Shakespeare altered the features of Hamlet's duty, by the alteration he necessitated the use of other efforts to perform it than those employed by the young prince in the novel. There he used cunning to preserve his life only until he could successfully punish the unlawful exercise of force, by force.

It has been said that the comprehension of the tragedy of Hamlet is the history of a man's own mind. This seems to me a sweeping statement, but I do believe that if a man will put himself in Hamlet's place, and then examine the workings of his own

mind, he will understand what Hamlet was suffering and thinking during the two months of inaction that followed the revelation of the ghost.

He knew that he was doubly bound by filial obligation to obey his father's command. His duty to his mother, as well as to his father, forbade him to neglect it. His was the task to save his mother's soul from perdition, by inducing her to repent her sin, and renounce the thing she sinned for. Hamlet's conscientiousness made him feel this was imperative, it was a religious obligation, and he accepted and meant to perform it. While his cause for grief had been increased by his father's revelation, his sorrow was not so overwhelming after as before it: he no longer sorrowed as one without hope. Obedience to his father was obligatory; in this was included his duty to both his parents; by performing this duty he would seat himself upon the throne; this Hope whispered whenever his purpose cooled. The revelation of the ghost had given his life an object, and had stimulated his soul to a feverish eagerness. He was no longer always despondent; he watched his uncle when with him, and thought about him when absent. He hoped that by some overt act or word Claudius would betray his guilt.

Nor did Hamlet's conscience trouble him when he contemplated the killing of the king; the king was an adulterer, a murderer and a thief: it would be "perfect conscience" to rid the world of him. In the old *Hystorie* (p. 304) Hamlet expresses this conviction in the following words:

"And who knoweth not that traytors and periured

persons deserve no faith nor loyaltie to be obserued towardes them, and that conditions made with murtherers ought to be esteemed as cobwebs, and accounted as if they were things neuer promised nor agreed vpon: but if I lay handes vpon Fengon, it will neither be fellonie nor treason, hee being neither my King nor my Lord: but I shall iustly punish him as my subiect, that hath disloyaly behaued himselfe against his Lord and soueraigne prince."

If Hamlet's task had been nothing more than to compass the death of his uncle, it would have been instantly accomplished. To give rest to his father's perturbed spirit Hamlet would have rushed upon Claudius and stabbed him to the heart even though the courtiers' daggers had the next moment been buried in his own breast. He did not set his life at a pin's fee.

But by thus killing the king he would make it forever impossible to fulfill the remainder—the most important part—of his father's imposition, and would involve Gertrude still further in her guilt. Her love for Claudius would blaze up anew when he was slain; she would see in the murder only the personal revenge of Hamlet because he had been ousted from the throne; she would wrap Claudius in her love, and embalm him in her heart, feeling that he had fallen a martyr to an unjustifiable hatred. Hamlet could not kill the king until he had separated Gertrude's affections from him. This was the chief consideration that held him so long inactive.

VIII.

HAMLET loved Ophelia: until that dreadful night with the ghost, he had hoped she would become his loved and honored wife. His mother he had always revered as the embodiment of womanly virtue, and Ophelia—highest praise that he could give her—was like his mother. The revelation of the ghost has made this likeness fatal. He must renounce Ophelia now. He can not for an instant contemplate giving to his own children such a mother as he himself possesses. Hamlet thinks this in the days that followed the revelation of the ghost, but this is not all he thinks: sometimes he is incredulous as to the reliability of the apparition; he reflects that the spirit he has seen may be the devil—the father of lies—and he doubts whether his father was murdered, he doubts whether his mother is criminal; he fears the arch-adversary may have set a trap for his soul, which he hopes to secure by making him kill the king.

He can not determine how to find out the truth. Much as he dislikes the king, how gladly would he disbelieve the ghost. Could he but prove the ghost a liar he might again indulge his love; he would not need to abandon his faith in Ophelia or control his affection for her.

It was in some such mood as this that he wrote

the letter to Ophelia that Polonius afterward read to the king and queen.

The First Quarto represents this letter, which is much shorter there than it now reads, as having been sent to Ophelia before her father cautioned her to avoid Hamlet and receive no tokens from him, and therefore before the revelation of the ghost. We are forced to this conclusion by Corambis's (Polonius's) statement to the king:

> Now when I ſaw this letter, thus I beſpake
> my maiden:
> Lord Hamlet is a Prince out of your ſtarre.

But in preparing the Second Quarto Shakespeare re-wrote the whole scene in which the letter is read, and added to it more than one-half as much as it before contained. He cut out the statement which fixes the time at which the letter was received, and greatly amplified it: in the First Quarto it consisted only of the rhymed lines:

> Doubt that in earth is fire,
> Doubt that the ſtarres doe moue,
> Doubt truth to be a liar,
> But doe not doubt I loue.
> To the beautifull *Ofelia:*
> Thine euer the most vnhappy Prince *Hamlet.*

The changes Shakespeare made in this letter, and the additions to it, embodying Hamlet's statement—

> O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not art to reckon my groans: but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it—

justify us in attributing it now to a time after the revelation of the ghost. If the ghost were really

his father's spirit, Hamlet felt that the story it told would compel him to separate himself forever from Ophelia; but while he was unable to convince himself that the story was true, his heart constantly pleaded with his reason for permission to cherish and preserve its love. Hamlet knew that he had been excluded from Ophelia's presence, his former letters had been returned to him and audience denied him. He pondered over the causes that might have induced this changed behavior, and reasoned something in this way: 'I doubt my uncle, I doubt my mother, I doubt Ophelia, I doubt even my own judgment as to right and wrong, because I doubt the indications from which my judgment must be made. *Is* my mother only seeming-virtuous, and my uncle a smiling villain? If I doubt Ophelia, for an unproved reason, may not Ophelia, in her turn, doubt me?' He can not bear to be suspected of changeableness by her whom he so dearly loves, even though he does doubt her, and, desiring that she shall not relinquish her faith in his affection until he has been absolutely convinced that he must withdraw it, he sends her the letter, the only one Polonius sees. In the happy days when Ophelia was of her "audience most free and bounteous," they did not need to write. This is the letter:

To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia,
—In her excellent white bosom, these, &c.

Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not art to reckon my groans: but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him,

HAMLET.

In spite of her father's commands Ophelia did not return this letter to Hamlet—who would not wish to retain so earnest and impassioned an avowal of love? But her disobedience ended here, in self-indulgence. Hamlet waited, vainly hoping for an answer. Ophelia had received the letter and he wearied for a reply. Again he became a prey to his belief in the dreadful visitation, once again he believed that Ophelia was faithless and unworthy. Day after day he revolved her conduct in his mind, night after night he brooded over the revelation of the ghost. Two months had passed since he received it, and he had not yet proved its truth or falsity. During all this time he had had no interview with Ophelia, and had been unable to resolve his doubts as to her integrity, and the continuance of her love. This struggle had impaired his health, he could neither eat nor sleep; and finally, driven to absolute lack of self-control by his solitary communings with his melancholy, Hamlet broke into Ophelia's presence, which he sought in her very chamber; but when he stood before her, he regained his self-command, and withheld himself from speaking any of the words with which he might have blasted her ear. The particulars of the interview we know from Ophelia's report of it to her father. We, who know what was in Hamlet's mind, who

know that with every sense he sought from Ophelia's mien the confirmation or the resolution of his doubts, can pity him: his very appearance should excite our pity.

> His doublet all unbraced;
> No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
> Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
> Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
> And with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
> To speak of horrors.

Even such a physical condition had the conflict in Hamlet's soul produced.* There was no interchange of speech at this short meeting; if Ophelia were false he could not trust her words, but he had faith in the "eternal blazon of her lineaments." She describes Hamlet's behavior to her father:

> He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
> And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
> He falls to such perusal of my face
> As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
> At last, a little shaking of mine arm
> And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
> He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
> That it did seem to shatter all his bulk
> And end his being: that done, he lets me go:

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* I think Shakespeare would not have represented Hamlet in this condition of disorder were it not for these lines in the old Hystorie (p. 290):

hee rent and tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in the durt and mire, his face all filthy and blacke, running through the streets like a man distraught, not speaking one worde, but such as seemed to proceede from madnesse, and meere frenzie.

> And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
> For out o' doors he went without their help,
> And, to the last, bended their light on me.

Poor maid! the last time the light of Hamlet's eyes was turned on her in love!

Who can tell what trifle light as air confirmed him then in the renunciation of Ophelia? A look, a movement, magnified by vigilant jealousy, is confirmation strong as proof of holy writ. Ophelia tells her father she had been much affrighted: it may be Hamlet saw her shrinking fear, and attributed it to changing love, or to an inability to meet his questioning eye without a blush. He knew Ophelia well—much more intimately than we do—he knew what license she had given to the expression of her love, and, after debating the question for two endless months, he finally decides, in this pathetic interview, that she has manifested at least the potentiality of wrong-doing. Did we not know that her father and her brother had judged her with the same harsh judgment, we might condemn Hamlet when he thus repudiates his love, for no apparent cause. The frailty of his mother is not a sufficient reason for his severe judgment of Ophelia, but it was fortified, and suspicion fostered in Hamlet's mind, by his recollection of the private hours he had passed in Ophelia's presence. Poor girl! she had no mother to teach her the beauty of reticence or maidenly reserve, and now she pays the penalty of her unconscious fault. We must accept Hamlet's judgment as to the possible frailty of Ophelia. May

we not believe that he had seen some sensitiveness, some susceptibility, some riot in her blood, which, pondered on, led to his final judgment of her character, and drove him to the bitter conclusion that he dared not entrust the guardianship of his honor to her?

Hamlet leaves Ophelia's chamber convinced of the reliability of the ghost, and knowing that he must obey his father's command; but in the hours that intervene between this interview and the mock-play, when his doubts are set at rest forever, he suffers many alternations of doubt and of belief. If he could trust the ghost his course would all along be comparatively clear to him: it is his fear that he may be the victim of a delusion that prevents his taking any steps to obey its dread command. How dare he, on no other testimony than the unwitnessed statement of an apparition, accuse his mother of adultery, his uncle of murder?

Do you say this vacillation between doubt and certainty indicates a diseased and unbalanced mind? Not so. Put yourself in Hamlet's place, and frankly confess you would have wavered as he did, or else point out the grounds from which you could derive a fixed opinion.

IX.

IT is not until after Hamlet goes to Ophelia's chamber, two months after the revelation of the ghost, that we receive any intimation that he is considered insane. As Ophelia describes his appearance and behavior to Polonius, the old chamberlain jumps to a conclusion that is very pleasing to him—he would gladly see his daughter married to the crown prince—and exclaims:

> Mad for thy love?

and Ophelia replies:

> My lord, I do not know;
> But truly, I do fear it.

Ophelia knew that Hamlet had been sad before she sent back his letters and refused to receive his visits, in obedience to her father's command; but she had seen that in her society his grief seemed forgotten, and she had hoped that, the memory of his father's death growing fainter, he would find renewed happiness in the enjoyment of her love. She had not spoken with him in two months, although he had tried to obtain speech of her, and it was natural that she should think Hamlet's altered bearing arose from her unkind treatment of him, which, as we know, began on the very day he received the revelation from his father's spirit. She too was most unhappy: her heart was like to

break at the thought that she had been compelled to inflict this sorrow on her lover.

As soon as she disclosed to her father the particulars of Hamlet's visit to her closet, Polonius at once determined to take her with him to the king.

Come, go with me: I will go seek the king.
This is the very ecstasy of love,
Whose violent property fordoes itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.
What, have you given him any hard words of late?
Oph. No, my good lord; but, as you did command,
I did repel his letters and denied
His access to me.
Pol. That hath made him mad.
I'm sorry that with better heed and judgement
I had not quoted him: I fear'd he did but trifle,
And meant to wreck thee; but, beshrew my jealousy!
By heaven, it is as proper to our age
To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions
As it is common for the younger sort
To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king:
This must be known; which, being kept close, might move
More grief to hide than hate to utter love.

Polonius hoped to prove that love-sickness was the cause of Hamlet's changed behavior, and he hoped also that Ophelia might be required of him as a bride for the prince, if that should prove to be the physic that his case required. This is made a little more evident by the First Quarto:

Lets to the King, this madneſſe may prooue,
Though wilde a while, yet more true to thy loue.

Ophelia apparently begged to be spared this pain-

ful interview, and, to avoid it, gave her father the letter which he shortly afterward read to the king and queen. That Polonius desires his daughter in person to bear witness to Hamlet's love for her, is only one of the many touches by which Shakespeare paints the father's character. He was by nature shrewd, cautious, unscrupulous, and calculating: Claudius recognizes his worth as a willing instrument, when dirty work is to be done. Very probably the honest-hearted elder Hamlet despised him for his crookedness, and did not conceal his opinion: both Hamlet and the queen show a dislike to him from the first. Clandius may have been indebted to him for his services with the populace when Hamlet was overlooked and his uncle seated on his throne; this service was probably the incentive to Claudius's words to Laertes:

> The head is not more native to the heart,
> The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
> Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.

and he was certainly a favorite with the populace, who, to avenge his death, would have made Laertes king. It is possible that the chamberlain suspected the foul play by which the throne was vacated, but if he did he gave his "heart a winking, mute and dumb," and made no sign: he was a perfect courtier, and Claudius fully recognized his value. He went to the palace with very little doubt that if Hamlet preferred his suit to Ophelia, the king would overlook the difference in their rank and join their hands in marriage; but he was very careful not to express this to their majesties.

While Polonius is going from his own house to the castle we are present at the reception of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They had been hastily sent for, with the hope that as they were schoolfellows of Hamlet,

> brought up with him,
> And sith so neighbour'd to his youth and 'haviour,

they might draw him on to pleasures, and discover, as the king says,

> Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus,
> That, open'd, lies within our remedy.

The king explains the need that he had of their services, saying:

> Something have you heard
> Of Hamlet's transformation; so call it,
> Sith not the exterior nor the inward man
> Resembles that it was.

And the queen adds—

> And I beseech you instantly to visit
> My too much changed son,

The king speaks of Hamlet's "transformation," and Gertrude calls him her "too much changed son"; only Polonius afterward speaks of Hamlet's madness, saying:

> I do think, . . . that I have found
> The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy,

The king in repeating this to Gertrude does not use Polonius's harsh word, but says:

> He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found
> The head and source of all your son's distemper.

Gertrude, having no suspicion that her son is mad,

and knowing that it is very unlikely that Polonius has made a valuable discovery, replies:

> I doubt it is no other but the main;
> His father's death, and our o'er hasty marriage.

Neither of these causes is sufficient to dethrone Hamlet's reason, and neither king nor queen seems at this time to have considered him a lunatic.

We must now inquire what have been Hamlet's occupations during the past two months, with intent to discover whether he has before indicated that he is mad. We know what his thoughts have been, how he alternately doubted and believed the ghost, but what were his actions? what did he do or refrain from doing? The first information on the subject comes from Polonius, and is, as we might expect, a little exaggerated:

> And he, repulsed—a short tale to make—
> Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
> Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
> Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
> Into the madness whereon now he raves,
> And all we mourn for.

This, translated into plain English, means: he was very sad, so sad that he would neither eat nor sleep, therefore he became weak and light-headed, and from this condition he has become mad, as is proved by his behavior to my daughter just now. This, barring the conclusion, is a true statement of facts.

These are the conditions, with the exception of the last (the madness), that an able physician would expect in a sensitive soul indulgent of its grief and brooding over its unhappiness, doubting and unable

to resolve its doubts. Hamlet's sensibility and his self-tormenting do not indicate a strong and self-reliant man, and critics find it hard to reconcile the vacillations and inconsistencies he exhibits. But we know that Hamlet is, in fact, only a youth, he has a woman's soul, we must "judge him by the heart and not the intellect"; all that seems extreme in him would be at once excused in a super-sensitive, emotional girl, because it would seem natural in her, and we should not call it madness.

But Hamlet did not pass all these two months in solitary brooding; to be sure, he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, —

> I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises,—

but this does not mean that he has taken no exercise; he has abandoned the exercises he was accustomed to, those probably that would bring him into intimate contact with the courtiers: still Polonius says, while unfolding his discovery to the king and queen:

> You know, sometimes he walks four hours together
> Here in the lobby.

And in Act V. Scene II. Hamlet, telling Horatio about his skill in fencing, says:

> Since he—

(Laertes, who departed the very day Hamlet heard the revelation of the ghost)

> went into France, I have been in continual practice; I shall win at the odds.

It was before Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's closet

that the Frenchman's—Lamond's—visit to the Danish court was paid, and at that time Hamlet had become so proficient with the foils that, inspired by the Norman's report of Laertes's skill in fencing, "he could nothing do but wish and beg" the latter's "sudden coming o'er to play with him." These statements show clearly that Hamlet had not been physically inactive; but we should be almost sure of it without this testimony. His father's command and the results which Hamlet expected from obedience to it, had made him hopeful; and it does not appear that he secluded himself, even in the first days of his fasting and watching,—the testimony is rather against this supposition. It is evident from the last scenes of the tragedy that the king and queen recognize Horatio as Hamlet's especial friend, and all the manifestations on which they base this conclusion must have been made after the revelation of the ghost, for Hamlet did not know of Horatio's presence in Elsinore until the day on which the revelation was made. After the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, when Hamlet has chatted a little while with them, he does not try to excuse himself and escape to solitude; he says:

> Shall we to the court? for, by my fay, I cannot reason.

And the entertainment of the players, and the quick determination to present a play, to which the court should be invited, indicate that he had not withdrawn himself into solitude. He would have suffered more in separating himself entirely from the court life, than in sharing it: seclusion would

have deprived him of all opportunity to advance in the performance of his task. Hamlet was always thinking of this, and preparing himself to accomplish it. His fencing was not caused by envy of Laertes's skill, but was pursued in anticipation of the hour when he might need all his strength and cunning to complete the fulfillment of the ghost's behest, and kill the king—his father's murderer. Hamlet had undoubtedly been very watchful of Claudius, hoping some unguarded word or act would furnish evidence to support the testimony of the apparition: he probably was informed of everything that his uncle did or said. He had kept much closer watch upon the king than had Claudius upon him; therefore when Polonius came with the report of his discovery, Claudius, who had not cared or noted what Hamlet was about, except that he still seemed to be unreconciled to his situation, was ready to believe the prince insane. He was glad to believe it: madness would account for Hamlet's "transformation," and a mad prince could not expect to succeed to the throne of Denmark.

I think Hamlet was never mad, and I think that he never feigned madness until after Polonius ascribed it to him. He had charged his friends, should he "see fit to put an antic disposition on," that they should not reveal the deception; but Shakespeare's Hamlet probably would never have thought of feigning madness, had it not been set down in the old *Hystorie*, as the means adopted there by the young prince to prolong his life.

Hamlet does not feign madness with that design;

his life is not threatened until after he has done so: it is used by him only that he may profit by the license madness takes to mock and abuse its interlocutors. Hamlet found in it a relief from the silence he habitually imposed on himself in the presence of any member of the royal circle. He could not meet and converse with them on any common ground, but, after insanity was attributed to him, he was enabled to express his opinions without being compelled either to justify or to retreat from his position.

Shakespeare borrowed the expedient from the *Hystorie*, but he took great care that Hamlet should never seem to the audience to be mad. He re-wrote and modified every speech of every personage in the First Quarto that might lead his hearers to judge that the madness was real and not assumed. Whenever Hamlet, for the purpose of indulging liberty of speech toward Polonius, or the king, or his two school-fellows, affects the license madness gives, if it is not palpable to the audience that the madness is only assumed, Shakespeare makes his hero, by some speech like "these tedious old fools," or "they fool me to the top of my bent," indicate that he is only covered with a mantle that he can drop as soon as the need for its use is past. Every outbreak that might make us conclude his mind was really diseased is followed, at once, by a conversation or a soliliquy in which he shows more than the acuteness and the mental balance of an average mortal. The king and Polonius, however, are not in Shakespeare's confidence; therefore, when the councilor asserts that Hamlet is mad, and produces what he considers

proof, Claudius, who would much rather believe Hamlet incapable of making inquiries into the particulars of his father's death, than that

> There's something in his soul,
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,

gladly accepts it as the truth, and asks:

> How may we try it further?

Polonius, desiring at any sacrifice of his own or his daughter's delicacy, to secure Hamlet as a son-in-law, even though he be mad, suggests that a meeting be contrived between his daughter and the prince, of which the king and he shall be hidden witnesses; this Claudius assents to, but elaboration of the plan is prevented by Hamlet's approach. Gertrude first perceives him and says:

> But, look, where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

This is one of Shakespeare's delicious little touches the subtlety of which often escapes us. The prince, who has just been represented as a raving lunatic, slips quietly into our presence lost in the perusal of his book. This master-stroke we may be sure was purposely introduced to point out the contrast between Hamlet's reported and his actual condition. We had not seen him since the night of his wild interview with the ghost, and it was necessary that we should have testimony on which to believe or disbelieve Polonius's astounding proposition. His quiet, unostentatious approach convinces us that his interview with Ophelia an hour before can be

attributed to some other cause than madness; but Polonius, impatient to prove what he so much desires, but which as yet rests only on his daughter's report, requests their majesties to withdraw and let him meet the prince alone.

X.

We know that Hamlet decided, when he forced his way into Ophelia's presence and perused her countenance, that he must cast her out of his life, even though he might not be able at once to remove her from his heart. Hamlet dearly loved Ophelia, and he had believed that she loved him. Reflection on her bearing during the morning's interview renewed his belief in her affection, and, searching for the reason that had induced her for two months to seclude herself from him, he concluded that she had done so only in obedience to her father's commands. Further reflection convinced him that these commands had been given wholly with the view of forcing from him a demand for the maiden's hand in marriage. This request he has now determined never to make, and from this decision he never again wavers.

We are nowhere expressly told that Hamlet knew what Polonius had been hoping, but he was quick of apprehension, shrewd, and even worldly wise, and we must infer this, and nothing else, from the conversation that ensued between them. It indicates to us very plainly that Hamlet wishes to inform the chamberlain that he prefers no suit to Ophelia, and so Polonius would have understood it had he not been blinded by his preconceived ideas.

Pol. O, give me leave:
How does my good lord Hamlet?
Ham. Well, God-a-mercy.
Pol. Do you know me, my lord?
Ham. Excellent well; you are a fishmonger.
Pol. Not I, my lord.
Ham. Then I would you were so honest a man.
Pol. Honest, my lord!
Ham. Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.
Pol. That's very true, my lord.
Ham. For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god * kissing carrion,—Have you a daughter?
Pol. I have, my lord.
Ham. Let her not walk i' the sun: conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to't.
Pol. [*Aside.*] How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter: yet he knew me not at first; he said I was a fishmonger: he is far gone, far gone: and truly in my youth I suffered much extremity for love; very near this. I'll speak to him again, What do you read, my lord.
Ham. Words, words, words.

Hamlet knew, as well as we do, that measured by the rule and square of the proprieties, his visit to Ophelia's chamber was an unpardonable liberty. He feels assured that the maiden has already told her father of the occurrence, and when he first per-

* To be consistent I make this quotation as it is given in the Globe Shakespeare, from which I have made all others, but reference to the Quartos and Folio will show that Shakespeare wrote "good,"—*good kissing carrion. Good* is the word he employed and most editors retain it. Warburton first made the change from *good* to *god*, and advanced a long argument to sustain it, and Johnson, in approving it, said, "This is a noble emendation, which almost sets the critic on a level with the author."

ceives the old chamberlain he is not sure what will be his action under the circumstances; he believes that, with justice, he will be incensed; but Polonius's first question, "How does my good lord Hamlet?" shows that the old courtier does not mean to manifest displeasure, or to abandon his design to unite his daughter and the prince. His second question, "Do you know me, my lord?" indicates, to Hamlet's quick discernment, that Polonius attributes his condition of disorder, a few hours before, to madness. "Do you know me, my lord?"—a question to be asked only of a madman or a fool. Quick as thought Hamlet sees the old man's mistake, and determines to humor it. He had no fear of the consequences; he had already seen himself indulged in the exhibition of an extreme sadness and melancholy, which, under the circumstances, must have been intensely irritating to king Claudius, and he believed that by an exaggeration of his bearing he could secure still further indulgence. Therefore, when he heard the question, "Do you know me, my lord?", showing so plainly what Polonius was thinking, Hamlet answered, looking him straight in the eye, to observe whether the shot told, "Excellent well; you are a fishmonger." Many far-fetched explanations of the meaning of this answer have been made, but the spirit of the reply is plain. Hamlet meant that Polonius was making merchandise of his daughter, desiring to secure a husband for her; Hamlet said *fishmonger*, because fish must be disposed of immediately, or they become worthless. When he sees that Polonius attributes this

reply to madness, taking the term literally, and not seeing the application of it, he says, "I would you were so honest a man," and the thought in his mind is, 'A fishmonger cries his wares publicly and tries to dispose of them, knowing that purchasers appreciate their perishable nature; you are trying to dispose of Ophelia, and you conceal your thoughts about her; you do not intimate that you consider her virtue vulnerable by me, although you have already manifested it, by shutting her away from my society.' Hamlet's succeeding speech is almost brutal, uttered, as it is, to a father about his daughter; but Hamlet felt that he was justified in making it by his knowledge of Ophelia's disposition, and by Polonius's efforts to secure him for a son-in-law. Still, when the speech was on his lips, he hesitated, and involved his meaning, so that it not only puzzled Polonius then, but has puzzled the host of commentators on the passage ever since.

The speech has no counterpart in the First Quarto. The only difference of the First Folio from the Second Quarto is in the spelling, and the use of a dash instead of a period in punctuating. In the Folio, the passage stands thus:

Ham. For if the Sun breed Magots in a dead dogge, being a good kissing Carrion—
Have you a daughter?
Pol. I have my lord.
Ham. Let her not walke i' th' Sunne:
Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend looke too 't.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act III. Sc. III. 205, is this line:

Shall we send that foolish carrion, Mistress Quickly, to him?

In *Julius Cæsar*, Act II. Sc. I. 129, we find:

Swear priests and cowards and men cautelous,
Old feeble carrions and such suffering souls.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III. Sc. V. 157, Capulet, abusing Juliet because she wishes not to marry Paris, cries:

Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!
You tallow-face!

Johnson's Dictionary defines *carrion* as "a name of reproach for a worthless woman." This is the sense in which Hamlet used the word: it is a term of opprobrium, a name of reproach, and, if his heart had not failed him when he used it, so that he felt compelled to interrupt himself with a question that required no answer:

Have you a daughter?

there would have been no misunderstanding of the phrase. *Good kissing Carrion* Hamlet used in the sense, *good to kiss;* as we say "good looking," meaning "good to look at"; and "good eating," "good to be eaten." The *For* referred to his preceding thought about Ophelia's virtue, and connected it with the dead dog that invited the kiss of the sun. Suppose we read the speech as Hamlet meant to utter it:

For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion, let your daughter not walk in the sun: concep-

tion is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to it.

This we may paraphrase to make the meaning perfectly clear:

For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, let your daughter not walk in the sun; she, being a good kissing carrion (or baggage), may be corrupted you know not how: conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to it.

There is no play upon words in the passage; it is a harsh statement of what Hamlet believed to be the truth—that is, that Ophelia was of a disposition that could not resist temptation; but Polonius did not understand it so, or if he did he ascribed the censure to madness. He speaks up sharply as Hamlet finishes his speech, and says:

How say you by that?

meaning, "What do you mean by that?" This is not given as an *aside*, in any of the early editions; it is an alarmed inquiry that the father directs to Hamlet, but, without waiting for an explanation, he instantly soothes his own fear to sleep with the words:

Still harping on my daughter: yet he knew me not at first; he said I was a fishmonger: he is far gone, far gone.

Throughout this conversation, which we need not follow further, Hamlet continually flouts Polonius and gives him equivocal answers, and at the end of the interview, as the lord chamberlain leaves him, the prince, to make clear to the audience, who have not seen him since that night two months

before when he had departed from their sight in such perturbation of spirit, that he has only been assuming madness, exclaims:

These tedious old fools!

Polonius does not know exactly what to think; he almost fears his sagacity has been at fault: he believes that Hamlet is mad, yet some of his replies are so apt that he is driven to the reflection:

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

With his usual perspicacity he thinks the very pertinence and fulness of meaning in Hamlet's remarks are a proof that he must be mad. He says:

How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of.

In other words—a sane man cannot appear so sane as an insane one. This is a fair specimen of Polonius's wisdom.

The audience understand Hamlet's meaning in the foregoing conversation, if Polonius does not. They remember his answer to the question *And shall I couple?* and know that his words have reference to his design to renounce Ophelia. Students ought to realize that the fact of his holding this conversation, and expressing to Polonius his judgment of Ophelia before the mock-play has absolutely convinced him that the story of the ghost is true, is a proof that Hamlet was not a laggard, or irresolutely incapable to execute his task when the hour for doing so should arrive.

XI.

AT the close of the interview between Hamlet and Polonius, as the lord chamberlain takes his leave, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter and are directed by him to the prince,—a very meddlesome, unnecessary direction, as they are already in his presence, but we all think we can speak before a sick or an insane person without being noticed or understood.

Hamlet receives his two friends with cordiality and affection, with almost the same affection he had displayed to Horatio. They were his playfellows, brought up with him from youth to manhood, intimately known to his dead father, and Hamlet believes that loving remembrance has brought them to his side, as it had brought his other friend. He expects from them sorrow for his loss, and sympathy with his grief, but he jokes with them as young men do joke, and then tells them that he is most unhappy, that Denmark is a prison, that he has bad dreams. It is evident that he is ready to unbosom himself to his dearly loved companions, but he does not force the conversation back to the consideration of his sorrow when they speak about the players, but questions them, instead, with interest and great intelligence, as to the condition of the stage in the city, why the players travel, and so on. Hamlet manifests no madness during the

whole conversation, nor does he show any incoherence or inconsequence; he exhibits only practical good sense, and he is on the point of confiding to his school-fellows some of the causes of his discontent with his surroundings, when he is interrupted by the re-entrance of Polonius, who comes meaning to announce the arrival of the players. Hamlet, seeing him before he has approached very close, checks himself, and changes the conversation, saying:

Hark you, Guildenstern; and you too: at each ear a hearer: that great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts.

Ros. Happily he's the second time come to them; for they say an old man is twice a child.

Ham. I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players; mark it.

All this is said so low that Polonius does not hear it, but, as he comes nearer, Hamlet, raising his voice so that it may be audible to him, continues as if he was finishing something he had been telling his friends in their ear:

You say right, sir: o' Monday morning; 'twas so indeed.

This bore no reference to anything they had been speaking of, and was uttered only to deceive Polonius and lead him to believe their talk had been on indifferent subjects. But Hamlet was not content with this. He probably disliked the lord chamberlain before the late king's death; he knows that Polonius was instrumental in depriving him of his inheritance, he knows that he has interfered to keep Ophelia from him, he knows that he believes him

mad, and, recalling the fact that, a few moments before, he had found Polonius in close conversation with the king and queen, who retired on his approach, he now suspects that he has aimed a further blow at him by representing to their majesties that his reason is dethroned. Hamlet does not fear the result of this imputation, he even sees that it may be useful to him, but, instinctively, he resents the knowledge that Polonius has it in his power to make him seem ridiculous, and he revenges this upon the old councilor by making him a butt for ridicule, and rejoices because, in so doing, he confirms him in a belief in his insanity. He will scarcely listen when Polonius tries to tell him of the actors' coming; he gibes the old man unmercifully, and, from this time forth, seems unable to refrain from doing so whenever he encounters him. Polonius has become to Hamlet what the red cloak is to the bull—wherever he sees it he charges on it. Even in the presence of the players he ridicules him, though he takes the pains to tell them that they must not allow themselves the same liberty.

As Polonius is indissolubly connected in Hamlet's mind with his lost love, his bantering words are suggested a second time on this same day by the remembrance of Ophelia: instead of replying to her father's encomiums of the players, he breaks in upon their praises with the words:

O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!
Pol. What treasure had he, my lord?
Ham. Why,
'One fair daughter, and no more,
The which he loved passing well.'

These lines were quoted from an old ballad well known to Shakespeare's audiences. Had the poet a subtle design in selecting them? Did he mean to suggest that there was a further parallel in Hamlet's mind when he saluted Polonius as "Jephthah, judge of Israel"? Did he wish them to remember that the daughter of Jephthah retired to the wilderness to bewail her virginity? Hamlet might have recited the whole ballad with personal applications, had he not been interrupted by the entrance of the players. He received them with a flattering welcome, and at once required the First Player to repeat a speech that he had heard before which pictures the grief of Hecuba at the death of Priam. By this recitation the Player is so moved that tears rise to his eyes, and he grows pale, and Hamlet, seeing his agitation, conceives a plan by which he can convince himself whether the apparition he has seen was really his father's spirit, or an emissary of the devil. He arranges for the presentation of a play the following night, and demands of the First Player, when the other actors have left his presence, whether he could play *The Murder of Gonzago* and insert in it a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which he should set down for him. When he is left alone his Third Soliloquy informs us why he asked these questions, and what his project is. He says:

> I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been struck so to the soul that presently
> They have proclaim'd their malefactions;

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
More relative than this: the play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

On beginning this soliloquy, which closes the second act, Hamlet is most bitter in his self-abuse: he contrasts the tender-heartedness of the Player, who shed tears at the mere recital of imaginary woes, with his own callousness and inaction under an incentive so much greater: he displays the natural exaggeration of invective that we employ against ourselves, and sometimes against our most valued friends, but the very fact that he reviles and blames himself for a necessary delay in the execution of what he, even yet, is not sure was his father's command, convinces his hearers that when once he is assured the ghost is reliable he will quickly find out a means to disenchant the queen, and to kill her seducer.

Hamlet arrests himself in his torrent of self-abuse with words that are, I think, generally misunderstood:

About, my brain!

It is considered that these words are equivalent to

To work, my brain!

and the succeeding words, "I have heard, etc.," are supposed to express the plan that the brain, by its working, evolves. This is not so; the plan was conceived in all its details, while the Player was describing Hecuba's imaginary sorrow, and Hamlet had already arranged, before he spoke the thought aloud, that the next night *The Murder of Gonzago*, with some pertinent inserted lines, should be played before his uncle. "About, my brain!" means, 'Turn about, my brain! do not consider my remissness any longer. I have now arranged a trap that shall catch my uncle if he be guilty.' It is the same kind of speech as that with which he interrupts himself the next night in his assertion of friendship for Horatio:

Something too much of this.

Hamlet knows that when he is alone, or with a trusted friend, he indulges in too much speech in the reaction from his usual taciturnity.

In the Third Soliloquy although Hamlet expresses great dissatisfaction with himself—dissatisfaction which I think is not justified—yet he utters nothing that can be ascribed to loss of mental power. How is it possible to believe that he alternates from reason to unreason? We know that lunatics in the presence of their keepers have the art and self-control to hide the manifestations of their insanity, but Hamlet seems to hide them most when he is absolutely alone.

The act which we have just considered represents, in its two scenes, the occurrences of one day at the Danish court—the first day of the Second Period.

We must remember that this day is two months after the revelation of the ghost. The revelation of the ghost is so often alluded to because it was the inspiration of all Hamlet's acts. The incidents of the day, which I wish to recall, even though to do so be tedious, are these: Early in the morning Hamlet forces his way into Ophelia's chamber; his bearing convinces Ophelia, and Polonius to whom she relates the circumstances of the visit, that he is mad; Polonius hastens to tell the king; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive; the ambassadors who were sent to Norway make their report; Polonius imparts his discovery to the king and queen, and Claudius, on his suggestion, agrees that Ophelia shall meet Hamlet where the king and Polonius can overhear their talk; Hamlet approaches, and, by a conversation in which he indicates to the audience that he is still determined to renounce Ophelia, confirms Polonius in the belief that he is mad; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are affectionately received by Hamlet, and are interrupted in their conversation with him by the entrance of Polonius and the players; Hamlet desires the recitation of a speech he had once heard, and the emotion of the Player while declaiming it suggests a means by which he may entrap the king's conscience and determine whether or not the ghost had spoken sooth; he arranges that a play shall be acted before his uncle in which some lines of his own composition shall be inserted; and finally, in the Third Soliloquy, after a torrent of self-abuse, he plainly expresses the reason why he

has remained so long inactive;—namely, the fear that the spirit he has seen may be the devil, and not his honored father, has constrained him to wait for proof.

All these are the occurrences of one day—the day on which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive at court. It is hard to realize that the next night they leave Elsinore forever, going with Hamlet to their death in England. We get the impression that they were a long time at the Danish court, and had formed their opinion as to Hamlet's madness from many and varied interviews with him. In no play is there more need to discriminate the time-keeping of Shakespeare's two clocks—as Christopher North expresses it—than in this.

XII.

THE first scene of the third act introduces the king and queen, Polonius and Ophelia, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are making their first report, on the morning after their arrival.

The relations of Hamlet and his two school-fellows are, I think, generally misunderstood; the scene of their meeting in the preceding act is misrepresented. This misunderstanding exists because we do not inquire what Shakespeare meant, but accept the interpretation this or that commentator or actor puts upon his lines. In the whole interview I do not find a word to indicate that Hamlet distrusted or suspected Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at their first meeting; indeed, all the testimony opposes this idea. It will be said that Hamlet's *aside:*

Nay, then, I have an eye of you,

indicates that he suspected them, and I might agree to this if I felt sure that Shakespeare meant these words to be said "aside," but there is no such direction in any of the early editions. Steevens first inserted it, but it is not in the Quartos or the Folio, and these are the legitimate sources of the play. I think these words should be spoken openly, in a frank and cheery tone; the context indicates this. Hamlet believed the king and queen had sent for his two

friends, and he wanted to help them to the confession that this was so. While he would have preferred to have them come from pure love of him, as Horatio had done, he did not suspect their friendliness because their visit was made on the solicitation of his mother. He had been, and still was, unhappy and ill—transformed from his former self, and it did not grieve or displease him to know that his friends had been sent for to cheer him, but he did want to know what they had been told respecting his condition. Until that morning—the morning of their coming—there had existed no suspicion that he was mad. Polonius had conceived the idea only a few hours before, and had communicated it to the king and queen. Hamlet had seen the three in close conversation, and had seen their majesties disappear as he approached, and, when he discovered that Polonius supposed him mad, and, for that reason, excused his conduct to Ophelia, he felt assured that the old councilor had made the king and queen partakers of his secret, and he thought it possible that they, in turn, might have told Guildenstern and Rosencrantz that their son's mind was diseased. He wanted to discover if this was so; he meant to confide in his friends and laugh with them at the idea, and he afterward introduced the subject with this design, but was interrupted by the entrance of Polonius: and it was Hamlet's recognition of Polonius's foolishness in judging him insane that inspired his words to his friends:

That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clouts.

When Hamlet asked his two school-fellows:

But, in the beaten way of friendship what make you at Elsinore?

he felt no suspicion of their integrity; he had thrice asked Horatio the same question:

And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?

But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

and,

But what is your affair in Elsinore?

Hamlet believes that loving remembrance has brought his play-fellows to court, but he also suspects that they were invited to come, and therefore he asks the triple question:

Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation?

The question is thrice repeated because they do not reply promptly to his first inquiry. He knows that his mother is grieving over the change in his conduct and disposition, and is not surprised at her sending for his two friends; he realizes that they may not like to confess that they were prompted to their visit; he even thinks it possible that they have been bound to secrecy; and he continues his questioning, but without any suspicion that their regard for him is not as warm and strong as his for them.

But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no.

Is it possible to believe that this beautiful adjuration was used by Hamlet as a cover to his thoughts, and that he knew their "ever-preserved love" was even then a thing of the past? No! Hamlet used this language in all sincerity, desiring only to make it easy for his friends to confess that they were sent for. The false friends were young men, unschooled in deceit and concealment, and, responsive to this earnest appeal, each sought from the other's face permission to make Hamlet partaker of the knowledge they possessed. Seeing the interchange of glances, noting Rosencrantz's question, "What say you?" to encourage them to frankness, Hamlet exclaims:

Nay, then, I have an eye of you,—[I see your confusion;] If you love me, hold not off.

And, in response, Guildenstern admits:

My lord, we were sent for.

Hamlet knew that thus to betray a confidence reposed in them by their sovereigns was no slight proof of friendship, and he accepted this admission as an earnest of his school-fellows' love, and forestalled their further confession by himself telling them why they had been summoned. He would have told them more if the current of his thoughts had not been altered by the news of the players' approach. If Hamlet had suspected his school-fellows of being spies upon him he would never have said:

My uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived. . . . I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.

Nor would he have arranged, in their presence, for the insertion, by the players, of any lines in *The Murder of Gonzago;* neither would he, in parting from them, have said,—

My good friends, I'll leave you till night: you are welcome to Elsinore.

Actors make Hamlet hesitate at the word *friends*, and finally pronounce it as though it were an ironical appellation, and this constrains them to omit "You are welcome to Elsinore." Hamlet would not have uttered these words if he had not meant them—nowhere does he conceal his feelings by falsehood, and Shakespeare would have omitted them if he had not thought them essential. Actors make Hamlet treat the two courtiers with marked rudeness, his tongue is tipped with sarcasms, and he shows more civility to the players than to them. If Hamlet had received and entertained his friends as actors represent, is it possible that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would not have described this behavior to the king and queen next morning? What they do say is this:

King. And can you, by no drift of circumstance,
Get from him why he puts on this confusion,
Grating so harshly all his days of quiet
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?
Ros. He does confess he feels himself distracted;
But from what cause he will by no means speak,
Guil. Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,
But, with a crafty madness, keeps aloof,
When we would bring him on to some confession
Of his true state.
Queen. Did he receive you well?

Ros. Most like a gentleman.
Guil. But with much forcing of his disposition.
Ros. Niggard of question; but, of our demands,
Most free in his reply.

This report proves that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have seen and talked with Hamlet *a second time*, because, in the first conversation, of which we were hearers, the prince did not "put on this confusion," or "confess himself distracted"; nor did his school-fellows try to "bring him on to some confession of his true state." After parting from them in the morning Hamlet probably reflected that his friends had expressed no sorrow for the necessity which induced the sending for them, and no sympathy with his unhappiness, and this reflection prepared his mind for a just judgment of them in their second interview, which he had appointed for the evening—"I'll leave you till night." Of this interview Shakespeare gives us no record, but we can infer its nature from the report of it I have just quoted, and we must conclude that *at this second meeting* Hamlet began to suspect the two spies, and that, the doubt of their integrity once born, it grew apace, until at the end of the next twenty-four hours it ripened into open repudiation and defiance.

It may be objected that unless Hamlet, in an interview of which we are witnesses, manifests his distrust of his friends, the change in his bearing toward them when we next see them together will be too abrupt—not to be accounted for. To understand the *Tragedy of Hamlet*, we must study it from the text as Shakespeare wrote it, not from the modern

actor's rendering of it. We shall find that it is a play in which results are presented, not processes. We see the results of certain thoughts and actions, but we must infer from the results, and from our knowledge of character, what these thoughts and actions have been. Thus Hamlet renounces Ophelia, but we are not told by what process of reasoning he made the decision to do so. Ophelia dies insane, but we do not know madness is impending until we see her absolutely deprived of reason: then we judge that the loss of her father and of her lover has destroyed her mind. Laertes appears suddenly in Denmark, two months after his father's death. We do not know he is coming, but when we see him we instantly recognize that Ophelia's summons has brought him thither. In the same way Shakespeare, in the scene of the mock-play, shows us that Hamlet distrusts his two school-fellows, and we know that he has ground for doing so, although we have not been shown the very manifestations of their treachery that have enlightened him. The report made by the two spies should assure the audience how thoroughly they are the creatures of the king. Taking their cue from him, in the teeth of opposing testimony, they seem convinced of Hamlet's "crafty madness," and speak of it openly in the presence of Polonius and Ophelia. To be sure they have observed the frivolity and impertinence of the prince's behavior to the lord chamberlain, but they know this bearing was assumed, even though they may not have known the reason why, and this, therefore, gave them no excuse for believing what Clau-

dius pretended to credit,—that Hamlet was really mad.

The question has been raised whether Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deserved the death that Hamlet sent them to. I think the report they made to the king answers this question. There is no proof that they knew the contents of the commission Claudius sent by them to England, but there is also no proof that, had they known them, they would have refused to carry it; and their ready acceptance of Claudius's dictum, that Hamlet was a dangerous lunatic, shows they were the king's instruments, and that he could use them for any office in their capacity to perform.

XIII.

IN making their report, in their anxiety to please the king, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern did not notice that Gertrude had not assented to the suggestion that her son was mad; but her silence and curt questions indicate plainly that Claudius's belief displeases her. She does not think Hamlet is insane, and she suggests this by her two questions:

Did he receive you well?

and,

Did you assay him to any pastime?

These questions interrupt the flow of their conversation, and suggest that she is judging her son from a totally different point of view from theirs. When Claudius asks her to withdraw, so that he and Polonius alone may listen to Hamlet's coming encounter with Ophelia, she coldly answers:

I shall obey you.

To Polonius, during all this scene, she does not speak a word. She does not wish to lend her countenance to the plan he and the king have formed; she still believes that "his father's death" and her "o'er hasty marriage" are cause enough for all the altered bearing that Hamlet has displayed; but she is courteous to Ophelia, and exempts her from the displeasure she exhibits toward the others.

She knows that the maiden loves her son, and is doing now only what filial obedience constrains her to, and she parts from her with the words:

> And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
> That your good beauties be the happy cause
> Of Hamlet's wildness: so shall I hope your virtues
> Will bring him to his wonted way again,
> To both your honours.

This is the first avowal Polonius has received that Hamlet's suit to Ophelia, if he shall press it, will be allowed. He is delighted, and instantly begins to place his daughter, and bestow himself and Claudius, so that they may witness the coming interview without themselves being seen. Ophelia's reply to the parting words of the queen enable us to judge with what feelings she is going to this interview. There is a dignity in their simplicity that touches us:

> Madam, I wish it may.

She has forgotten the ceremony that hedges a queen: to her, at that moment, Gertrude is only the mother of her love: this is her highest title. They are two women whose hearts meet on one object, and whose dearest hope is the happiness and well-being of the prince. The very lack of grammatical accord with Gertrude's preceding words shows how indifferent Ophelia is to her immediate surroundings. The brevity of her reply, which gives no excuse for the wish, no explanation of what she hopes may result from the interview, shows how fully her heart is possessed by it.

> Madam, I wish it may.

She wishes it so absolutely, so intensely, that the fewest, simplest words are used to express her longing. A single syllable added would weaken the force of her reply; protestation or amplification would only lessen our belief in the maiden's love. Polonius gives her a book—a book of devotion—and she takes it without a word. She does not perform any of the ceremonies of politeness; with her hand upon her heart to control its tumult she waits only for the coming of the prince; her mind is so projected into the coming interview, from which she hopes so much, that she forgets she is the companion of her king in a plot against her lover. She has not sought the interview, it has been forced upon her; a maiden less pliant would have avoided such a meeting; but Ophelia is happy in the knowledge that her father's command no longer exiles Hamlet from her presence, and she hopes by tender indications of her continued affection to restore him to mental health. She believes that madness animated him the day before, when he so rudely sought and left her presence without a word, but she feels no fear; she thinks her separation from him has been the cause of all his changed behavior; and she believes that, the cause removed, the effect will also disappear. These are her thoughts as Hamlet approaches. Poor maid! how horribly are they disproved and disarranged on his departure. When he enters the lobby she is not praying, though she appears to do so; she observes him with the eye of her soul, though her gaze seems fixed upon her book. She cannot speak till he has noticed her, she could not

speak even if she would; her heart has left her breast and tries to reach her lips; its beating prevents the use of speech; and Hamlet's long soliloquy gives her no more than time to recover command of her wavering courage and faltering tongue.

Claudius had sent for Hamlet to come to the lobby to meet him; and the prince, when he reaches the appointed place, glances carelessly around expecting to see his uncle. In his absence he continues the thoughts with which he was occupied when the summons reached him; he deliberates upon the new plan he has conceived by which he can satisfy himself as to his uncle's guilt or innocence; and he expresses his deliberations in speech.

Hamlet is more hopeful now than he has been since his mother's second marriage. When that was celebrated he was plunged into profound grief, for which he did not see any prospect of alleviation. His sorrow for his lost father he thought would endure forever, as would his disgust at his mother's inconstancy and abandonment of her son's claim to the crown. Her action had cut him off from his rightful succession until after his uncle's death. By her union with Claudius she had sanctioned the means by which he had obtained the throne, and Hamlet did not, at that time, think of trying to depose his uncle. Obedience to authority was Hamlet's controlling principle; and he submitted to the result of his mother's inconstancy, because she was his mother. Filial obedience did not, however, remove his cause for sorrow; and on his first appearance in the play we saw Hamlet wishing—as unhappy

youth so often wishes—that death would end his misery, and rebellious because the Almighty had "fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter." This rebellion of spirit did not even then tempt him to disobey his Heavenly Father's command, and since that sad day—the second day of the play—his situation has changed and he is now content to live: he no longer believes that a waste of years separates him from the throne. His father, whose claim on his obedience supersedes his mother's, has come from the grave and commanded him to kill his uncle.

With this command Hope woke in Hamlet's heart, and Ambition and Revenge. These three spirits have been his companions for two months. They have not led him any nearer to his goal, but their presence has cheered and encouraged him. Doubt has assailed him from time to time as to the identity of the apparition, and he has convinced himself that the apparition was his father's only to doubt again when he reflected on the grossness of the revelations it had made. But he had at last, only the day before, contrived a means to exorcise this demon forever, and the knowledge that he possesses this power renders him calm and comparatively happy while he waits for the hour to come in which he shall work the spell. He knows that the mock-play, whenever he presents it, will convince him of his uncle's guilt or innocence, but he is not absolutely certain that the time is ripe for its exhibition. Since he conceived the plan he has reflected on the ultimate results of the experiment. He fears that it will force immediate action on him if the king be

guilty; for if the mock-play convinces Hamlet that the ghost is trustworthy, it will also reveal to the king that Hamlet knows his secret; and Claudius will lose no time in silencing him forever, unless he, by more speedy action, prevents it. Hamlet reflects that if he kill the king before his own life is assailed —convinced of his guilt by the mock-play—he has no testimony that will satisfy the Danes that the deed was justified. They may believe only that he is a regicide who deserves death, and may at once inflict it. He doubts whether the presentation of the play, before he has secured proof that will satisfy others of his uncle's guilt, is a wise expedient. He believes that the play, if it convict the king, must also touch his mother's conscience to the same extent (he believes she was a party to her husband's murder), and he fears that, being the accomplice of Claudius, she may cling to him more closely than before their mutual guilt was discovered. This would postpone instead of hastening the fulfillment of his father's command. These considerations make him hesitate to put his plan at once in action. He reflects that trouble will inevitably result from the mock-play, be his uncle guilty or innocent. The play will touch him even if he did not kill his brother; the king and queen will be publicly rebuked for their "o'er-hasty marriage;" and the death of the player king by violence, and not by accident, will make public Hamlet's unfounded suspicions of his uncle. He realizes that his plan, formed hastily, and under the stimulus of the player's agitation, may be a foolish one. He almost concludes that it

will be better that he should continue to suffer—as he must still do if the ghost is proven a liar—than that he should cover two other comparatively innocent persons with shame, and direct suspicion toward them. These thoughts are not plainly expressed in the text, but we impute them to Hamlet because he expresses the result of them in the Fourth Soliloquy—*To be, or not to be.* He certainly weighed every consideration, for and against, before he finally determined to carry out his plan of the mock-play as he had at first conceived it.

He was occupied with his deliberations when Claudius's message summoned him to the lobby, and, when he found that his uncle had not yet come to the spot where he expected to meet him, Shakespeare makes Hamlet continue his meditation, and express it in speech, so that the audience may be certified as to the subject with which his thoughts are engaged.

The soliloquy, *To be, or not to be*, expresses his deliberations, and *does not relate to suicide.* Let us inquire what proof there is of this.

XIV.

IF we insert the nominative phrase that precedes, in Hamlet's mind, the words, *To be, or not to be*, the sentence will read: 'Is this thing, this plan, this play, with all its inevitable results, to be? Is it to be, or not to be: that is the question.' *To be, or not to be*, and the rest of this soliloquy, does not show us this prince advancing an argument to restrain himself from self-murder, but he reflects that his own death at his uncle's hands will probably be the result of the play if he presents it, and he rehearses the considerations that move all men, even those who have a Christian hope, to endure a long life with its known evils, rather than to seek death with its unknown miseries. If, with the belief that Hamlet is thinking of suicide, we try to express the words understood, in connection with the first words of the soliloquy, we must say, either—'Am I to be or not to be: that is the question;' meaning, 'Am I to exist, or not to exist?' or, 'Is it (my self-murder) to be, or not to be: that is the question.' This is not a thought that the succeeding words elucidate:

> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them?

In other words, 'the question is whether 'tis nobler for me to continue in my mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and, by opposition, to end them?' If we infer that the opposing which is to end the troubles is suicide, we must perceive that this is not opposition. Oblivion, if it followed death (but Hamlet knew it did not), might end his troubles, and a different nature from Hamlet's might contemplate seeking death as a relief from the task he had vowed to perform; but this would really be submitting to be overwhelmed by the sea of troubles, and not ending them by opposing them—which is the alternative Hamlet expresses. If Hamlet was contemplating suicide, and argued himself out of the idea, he would not afterward say:

> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn away,
> And lose the name of action.

He could not speak of self-murder as an enterprise of great pith and moment.

These difficulties are inherent in the soliloquy if we interpret it as a contemplation of suicide; they all vanish when we admit that he had not quite decided to present the play, and that he was reviewing the possible results of doing so.

Hamlet's thoughts ran something in this way:

'I cannot decide whether it is wiser to present

this play or not: there are reasons for and against it: is it *to be, or not to be?—that is the question.* I can not even determine *whether 'tis nobler in the mind to* continue passively to *suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?* I am not even sure that if I oppose them I shall end them. I may not be successful. I may die in the attempt. Even so?—*to die* is *to sleep; no more; and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd* for, and I can not see why all men do not welcome death. *To die,* is surely *to sleep;* but to sleep is not always to rest!—*to sleep* is *perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause.* This is the reason men do not welcome death; *there's the respect that makes calamity of so long life; for who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despised love, the law's delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear, to grunt and sweat under a weary life, but that the dread of something after death, the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn no traveler returns, puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of?* These are the considerations that restrain men from death. *Thus conscience does make cowards of us all; and thus the*

native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry, and lose the name of action.'

I think this paraphrase briefly expresses Hamlet's thoughts while he was waiting for his uncle. At the beginning he was contemplating what must follow the mock-play, and he saw that instead of killing Claudius he might be killed by him. At first thought, this seemed a consummation devoutly to be wished; to die was to sleep; no more; and this philosophic reflection set a text for his thoughts, which he pursued until he had set in array the troubles mankind is subject to, and had decided that, if death were only a sleep, all unhappy men would "their quietus make with a bare bodkin." The troubles he enumerates are not those only that he has suffered from; but the list is a synthesis of the miseries of rich and poor, of prince and peasant.

Hamlet has not been subjected to all, or half, the miseries he enumerates; but he knows that there are men who bear them, and he meditates on the incentive that induces humanity to suffer so long: this he says is dread of the worser troubles after death. He does not say that suicide, only, entails punishment; all death, whether self-inflicted or not, entails it. Conscience whispers to all men that they deserve discipline, and not knowing what it will be, mankind hesitates to seek relief in death from the troubles of this world: they fear to fly to evils that they know not of.

This generalization, this moralizing on present

and future punishment is the extent of Hamlet's meaning in the latter part of the soliloquy. The words, *To be or not to be: that is the question:* relate to the plan he has conceived and its results, and so Claudius understood it. He and Polonius hear the soliloquy, as they wait in hiding to observe Hamlet's conduct toward Ophelia; and Claudius, while he does not know—as the audience does—what subject Hamlet is revolving, perceives that it is some plan which bodes danger to him. He says:

> There's something in his soul,
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood;
> And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
> Will be some danger.

Some danger to me, Claudius means, *and not to Hamlet*. If Hamlet spoke of suicide, and Claudius understood him, the danger would be disclosed: it would menace Hamlet only, and Claudius need not fear the *hatch*. But the king knew from this soliloquy that Hamlet was brooding over something; incubating it; and he realized that the hatch and the disclose of the as yet unknown subject of meditation would be some danger to himself. Hamlet's threat to Ophelia, *all but one shall live*, confirmed this conclusion, and therefore Claudius determines, on the instant, to banish Hamlet from the court. He says,

> I have in quick determination
> Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England,
> For the demand of our neglected tribute:
> Haply the seas and countries different
> With variable objects shall expel

> This something-settled matter in his heart,
> Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
> From fashion of himself.

but this was not his real object. He does not care to restore Hamlet to happiness, but he determines to save himself. If he thought Hamlet spoke of suicide, Claudius would rejoice: his happiness would be secured if Hamlet, by his own act, should remove himself forever from his path. If he thought Hamlet spoke of suicide he would make no effort to expel this *something-settled matter in his heart* by sending him on a sea voyage, but would encourage, if he could, the broodings that were prompting Hamlet to invite death. The something-settled matter that was in Hamlet's heart was the project of the mock-play.

This scene is one of many where the audience—being the friends and confidants of Hamlet—understand the meaning of his words, and follow the current of his thoughts, while they seem unintelligible and inexplicable to those with whom he is in converse.

If Hamlet had been represented by Shakespeare as entering the lobby with his eyes fixed on a scroll in which was written out the lines he had prepared for the players to insert in *The Murder of Gonzago*, the meaning of *To be, or not to be*, never would have been disputed. It would be evident when he spoke, that he was considering the mock-play. To represent him thus is a liberty that any actor might take; and this little aid to understanding would be all that even a stupid audience would need to

make them discover the subject of Hamlet's thoughts.

The meaning of this soliloquy does not affect the progress of the play, it might be omitted without interfering with the action or understanding of it; but its true interpretation, if it be retained, is very essential to the development of Hamlet's character. We degrade Hamlet utterly if we admit that at this hour, when he has at last conceived a plan that will impose action on him, he is thinking of death as a possible means of release from the obligation he has accepted. From the moment he receives the command of his father's spirit, Hamlet never attempts to evade the performance of it, but he desires to convince himself that the imposition did not come from the devil. He did not feel that the duty—if it were a duty—was too heavy for him to accomplish; he felt competent to kill his uncle, and he believed he would be able to detach his mother's heart from him. He did long for death when he first realized that he had lost his father, his inheritance, and his place in his mother's heart; when he thought there was no place for him—an absolutely upright soul—in the unweeded garden of the world, but not after he had recognized as his duty the obligation to reclaim the crown from a murderer and a thief, and even when he most desired the balm of oblivion he had no thought of procuring it for himself. The duty afterward imposed on him by the apparition compelled him to live, and made life bearable, because it gave him hope of happier days. He vowed to perform the

task, and he expects to receive for its performance, in addition to the satisfaction of giving rest to his beloved father, the guerdon of a crown. The ghost's revelation, by making him reflect on Ophelia's disposition, has necessitated a great sacrifice, though it did not command it—the renunciation of a union with the maiden, but Hamlet's rectitude is so perfect that he knows he would not be happy with any but an absolutely pure nature, and he is at last reconciled to live without Ophelia. He made his final decision the day before he uttered this soliloquy, and conveyed it to Ophelia and Polonius. Since making that decision he has made a further advance toward fulfilling the ghost's command: he has conceived a plan that must force action upon him, if the spirit was indeed his father's.

Critics say that at this juncture, when at last he has secured the means to learn the truth,—the means for which he has been seeking for two months,—Hamlet, *because* he sees that the mock-play will necessitate action, seeks to evade it by committing suicide. What does he gain by suicide? If his uncle be guilty it should be as easy to kill him as to kill oneself, and why should he commit self-murder before he attempts to kill the king, when death is the utmost penalty that he can suffer if he make the attempt? If he tries to kill the king he may succeed, even if he pay the forfeit of his own life, but to die without attacking his uncle would be the height of cowardice, physical and moral. Why should Hamlet prefer self-murder to death at his uncle's hands or at the Danes'?

The soliloquy *To be, or not to be*, is prompted only by doubts whether it is best to present the mock-play, and a temptation to suicide does not enter Hamlet's mind.

In confirmation of this interpretation of Hamlet's musings let us consider how the current of his thoughts is indicated to us, all through the play. Every time he leaves our presence he is possessed by some controlling idea, and his mind is occupied by it until he again appears, and, taking up the consideration of the same subject, continues it in our sight and hearing. Thus, when we see him first he is disgusted with life and desirous to be rid of it. Horatio displaces these reflections by the intelligence that the dead king's spirit walks, and Hamlet leaves our presence possessed by this thought and by the determination to watch that night. When we next see him he has come to the platform to carry out that intention, and, when he leaves us again, he has sworn to make his memory a blank, to "wipe away all tender fond records," and devote himself to revenging his father's murder. Our next knowledge of him, which we get from report, not sight, shows him engaged in an act that his father's revelation has made necessary —the renunciation of Ophelia, and when we do see him, soon after this renunciation, his thoughts are still occupied by it, and he expresses his determination to Polonius, who does not, however understand him. The arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and of the players who follow them, suggests other thoughts. Hamlet requests the player to recite some lines, and, while listening to them, he conceives a

plan to entrap his uncle: he makes arrangements to execute it, and leaves our presence intent upon the idea. When he next appears the Fourth Soliloquy, *To be, or not to be*, indicates that he is still revolving the plan, which does not now seem so desirable as when he first conceived it. After continuing this soliloquy for some time, without making a decision, he interrupts himself, on catching sight of Ophelia, who compels him to repulse her by words, as he has already done by action. This conversation with her, on a subject that was already settled so far as he was concerned, does not engross him after it is ended, and his thoughts return to the consideration of the mock-play. When we see him next he is instructing the player how to speak the lines he wishes inserted in it. In spite of the risk of defeat and death he has decided to set his "mouse-trap." The principle of obedience exacts that he shall at least assure himself that the spirit was his father's. After the mock-play we clearly see all his thoughts until he leaves Denmark for England. The last words we hear him speak before he sails—

> O, from this time forth,
> My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!—

lead us to expect that bloody thoughts will occupy him when next we see him. He remains away almost two months, but, on his return to Denmark, his conversation with Horatio and the grave-digger proves that his only desire is at once to kill the king, and this feeling possesses him until the end of the play. Ophelia's funeral, and the fencing match, in-

terrupt but do not turn aside his thoughts from this one subject, and he dies having accomplished his father's injunction. Hamlet's speeches on his every entrance in the play indicate progress toward this point and not retrogression. The coherence of thought from one appearance to another is unbroken, unless we admit that in the soliloquy, *To be, or not to be*, his thoughts have been dislocated and turned back to connect with those he expressed in the First Soliloquy. This I can not allow.

XV.

A CONSIDERATION of the First Quarto and of the old *Hystorie of Hamblet* will help us to make a judgment, as to the subject of the prince's thoughts; but first we must convince ourselves that Hamlet has absolutely no doubt of the immortality of the soul, and steadfastly believes in a state of future rewards and punishments. He could not express this more strongly than he does in the Sixth Soliloquy, as he who runs may read. But, indeed, the return of his father's spirit from the grave should have convinced him that death did not end existence, had he ever felt any doubt, of which there is no proof. Most of Hamlet's suffering was the reflex of what his father was enduring *after death.* We need only now consider the Sixth Soliloquy with reference to the proof it gives us of Hamlet's belief in a future life. He sees the king on his knees absorbed in prayer, and is tempted to kill him.

> Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
> And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;
> And so I am revenged. That would be scann'd:
> A villain kills my father; and for that,
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
> He took my father grossly, full of bread;
> With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;

And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then revenged,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No!
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gaming, swearing, or about, some act
That has no relish of salvation in't;
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays:
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Does not this convince us that Hamlet knew death was much more than a dreamless sleep?

In the First Quarto the soliloquy *To be, or not to be*, and the succeeding conversation with Ophelia are introduced earlier in the drama. They precede the coming of the players and the conception of the idea of the mock-play: they immediately succeed the interview with Ophelia in her chamber. The conversation with Ophelia in the lobby is in substance, though not in literal expression, the same as that which Shakespeare, while altering its location, preserves in the Second Quarto, but the soliloquy is as follows:

To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
To Die, to ſleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to ſleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before our euerlasting Iudge,
From whence no paſſenger euer return'd,

The vndiſcouered country, at whoſe ſight
The happy ſmile, and the accurſed damn'd.
But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
Whol'd bear the ſcornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich curſſed of the poore?
The widow being oppreſſed, the orphan wrong'd,
The taſte of hunger, or a tirants raigne,
And thouſand more calamities beſides,
To grunt and ſweate vnder this weary life,
When that he may his full *Quietus* make,
With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
But for a hope of ſomething after death?
Which puſles the braine, and doth confound the ſence,
Which makes vs rather beare thoſe euilles we haue,
Than flie to others that we know not of.
I that, O this conſcience makes cowardes of vs all,
Lady in thy orizons, be all my ſinnes remembred,

Shakespeare, when he revised the play, kept the soliloquy and the conversation with Ophelia in apposition, but, while he made very little change in the conversation, he entirely re-wrote the soliloquy, altering and expanding it, and changing its application and its prominent idea.

In the First Quarto, the soliloquy, in the relation in which it stood to the other scenes, could not refer to the mock-play. There was no question of a play the result of which might necessitate killing Claudius, but Hamlet squarely debated the subject he had been considering for two months,—whether he should believe the ghost and act on its command or not. In the First Quarto the words, *To be, or not to be*, refer for their antecedent phrase to the revelation of the ghost and the duty imposed by it. The question thus suggested is the one for which the

comprehensive it (understood) is substituted. *To be, or not to be, I there's the point*, means, 'Am I to take the word of the apparition for sooth, and kill the king on this testimony, or not? Is it *to be, or not to be?*'

Shakespeare saw the possibility that the application of these words might not be perfectly plain, and he saw that the place they occupied in the First Quarto was not the most effective for them: therefore he removed the soliloquy to its present position.

I there's the point

did not suggest the consideration of alternatives as plainly as,

That is the question.

Therefore he removed the former phrase from its position in the first line, and inserted it further on, as,

ay, there's the rub,

filling the hiatus formed by its removal with,

That is the question.

Then he expressed another question, on the answer to which the answer to the first depended:

Whether 'tis (= is it) nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?

This second question is not given in the First Quarto: that instantly jumps to the consideration that death might result from Hamlet's efforts to obey the ghost. But Shakespeare, when he wrote,

And by opposing end them,

did not think that the phrase would be interpreted *and by uniting with them enable them to overcome me.* He thought he had exhibited Hamlet with such a noble character that other noble minds would not accuse him of cowardice and procrastination. He held the clue to all of Hamlet's thoughts and hesitations and actions, and he believed he had expressed all that was necessary to give others a hold on it. In a drama a character does not, as in a narrative, say, "At such a juncture I thought so and so:" his thoughts must be divined from his actions. Hamlet's soliloquies are, in this sense, his actions.

Some critics think that the change of position of the Fourth Soliloquy was injudicious, and their judgment is right if Hamlet was thinking of suicide. Its proper place with that interpretation is as near the First Soliloquy—

> O, that this too too solid flesh would melt—

as possible. But Shakespeare did not make the change of place without consideration. The elaboration of the soliloquy and the change of the restraining motive should convince us that he considered this matter also, and put the lines where he thought they were needed, filling the place from which he took them by the conversation of Hamlet and Polonius, and supplying words to introduce it that were not called for where the soliloquy was before located.

The change in the position of the soliloquy and its amplification was not the only alteration

Shakespeare made: he changed its main idea. According to the First Quarto men endure trouble in this world buoyed up by the hope of a blissful immortality:

> But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
> Whol'd bear the fcornes and flattery of the world,
> . . . who would this indure,
> But for a hope of fomething after death?

In the First Quarto Hope is the angel who sustains humanity during a long life; in the Second Quarto a threatening Nemesis, whispering of future punishment, frightens mankind into enduring it so long. This is a vital change in the prominent idea of the soliloquy. The First Quarto expresses the Christian sentiment, and this we should expect to animate Hamlet. It must be some strong reason that induced Shakespeare to substitute the pagan opinion for the Christian teaching. This reason we find on turning to p. 304 of the *Hystorie of Hamblet*. Reading from, "To conclude, glorie is the crowne of vertue," through the paragraph, we find there the origin of each idea of the soliloquy. Shakespeare re-wrote with the *Hystorie* before him, and he expressed in *To be, or not to be*, the same thoughts that moved prince Hamblet in the old novel. He altered their order and expressed them differently, but the end of Hamblet's conversation with his mother is paraphrased in *To be, or not to be*. Let us place the passages from the old *Hystorie* in the order in which Shakespeare used them, and point out the thoughts each one suggested to him, and the manner of their rendering in the soliloquy.

Hamblet has been debating whether he would better kill his uncle, and the means to be employed. He says: (p. 299)

it was not without cause, and iuste occasion, yᵗ my gestures, countenances, and words seeme all to proceed from a madman, and that I desire to haue all men esteeme mee wholly depriued of sence and reasonable vnderstanding, because I am well assured, that he hath made no conscience to kill his owne brother, (accustomed to murthers, & allured with desire of gouernement without controll in his treasons) will not spare to saue himselfe with the like crueltie, in the blood & flesh of the loyns of his brother, by him massacred: & therefore, it is better for me to fayne madnesse then to vse my right sences as nature hath bestowed them vpon me. The bright shining clearnes thereof I am forced to hide vnder this shadow of dissimulation, as the sun doth hir beams vnder some great cloud, when the wether in sommer time ouercasteth: the face of a mad man, serueth to couer my gallant countenance, & the gestures of a fool are fit for me, to yᵉ end that guiding myself wisely therin I may preserue my life for yᵉ Danes, & the memory of my late deceased father, for yᵗ the desire of reuenging his death is so ingrauen in my heart yᵗ if I dye not shortly, I hope to take such and so great vengeance, that these Countryes shall foreuer speake thereof. Neuerthelesse I must stay the time, meanes, and occasion, lest by making ouer great hast, I be now the cause of mine owne sodaine ruine and ouerthrow, and by that meanes, end, before I beginne to effect my hearts desire: hee that hath to doe with a wicked, disloyall, cruell, and discourteous man, must vse craft, and politike inuentions, such as a fine witte can best imagine, not to discover his interprise: for seeing that by force I cannot effect my desire, reason alloweth me

by dissimulation, subtiltie, and secret practices to proceed therein.

And further he adds:

I know it is foolishly done, to gather fruit before it is ripe, & to seeke to enioy a benefit, not knowing whither it belong to vs of right.

As these thoughts occupy Hamblet in the old novel, so they occur to our prince before he begins to speak: he knows it is foolishly done to seek to kill his uncle, in obedience to the ghost's command, before he secures testimony that will satisfy his mother and the Danes that Claudius deserves death; he knows it is foolishly done to seek to place himself upon the throne, before he is absolutely certain that his uncle wrongfully withholds it from him; he knows it is foolishly done to expose to his crafty uncle any device that his fine wit entertains, unless he is certain it will be successful; and, knowing all this, he does *not* know that it is wise to present the mock-play. These thoughts precede and suggest the first line of the soliloquy and its expansion. *Because* he knows all this, he says, speaking about the play:

> To be, or not to be: that is the question:

[I cannot decide it, nor can I now decide,]

> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them?

The next passage from the *Hystorie*—

glorie is the crowne of virtue, & the price of constancie, and seeing that it neuer accompanieth with infelicitie, but shunneth cowardize and spirits of base & trayterous conditions, it must necessarily followe, that either a glorious death will be mine ende, or with my sword in hand, (laden with tryumph and victorie) I shall bereaue them of their liues, that made mine vnfortunate—

leads him to think that, as his uncle is a coward and a traitor, the attempt against him may be successful. 'But if it be not,' Hamlet thinks, 'what of it? what if I be killed? what is it to die? to sleep; no more.' The amplification of this thought is expressed by—

To die; to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.

From this point the soliloquy is an expansion of the following passage:

For why should men desire to liue, when shame & infamie are the executioners that torment their consciences, and villany is the cause that witholdeth the heart from valiant enterprises, and diuerteth the minde from honest desire of glorie and commendation, which indureth for euer?

Not all the lines suggested by this passage are found in the First Quarto: the lines that follow,

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,

have no counterpart in it; but these lines are plainly a paraphrase of the passage I have just quoted, and the lines preceding it are, as plainly, suggested by it.

When Shakespeare added this paraphrase to the soliloquy, he perceived that a hope of happiness after death was not the motive that supported those whose consciences were tormented by "shame and infamie." He knew that men who were attended by these executioners did not hope but feared, and preferred to bear those ills they had, rather than fly to others that they knew not of. This is the reason Shakespeare made the change of *hope* to *dread.*

If we allow that Shakespeare paraphrased the *Hystorie*, we shall be constrained to admit that it expresses what Hamlet meant to express in the Fourth Soliloquy. We shall be compelled to perceive that he was revolving in his mind some "politic inventions, such as a fine wit can best imagine, not to discover his enterprise," and we shall be forced to conclude that he spoke of death in general, as affecting all mankind, and, when he contemplated the possibility of his own death, thought of it as inflicted by others, and not by his own hand.

Early in this century Ziegler, a German actor, advanced the theory that Hamlet, by *To be, or not to be*, referred to the mock-play, and not to suicide, and several other German critics have since agreed with him. This seems to be the only interpretation that does not degrade Hamlet in our estimation: to see him seeking oblivion by suicide minifies him. This idea of the soliloquy does not rob it of any of

its beauties, but it enriches our idea of Hamlet. We see that he has even greater moral and intellectual gifts than we before attributed to him. We realize that in spite of his appreciation of what might ensue, he did present the mock-play, and we are forced to confess that he did not delay unduly to prove the ghost reliable, or to try to execute its dread command.

Shakespeare did not, as is asserted, write carelessly when, after the return of the ghost from the other world, he made Hamlet speak of

> The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns.

Hamlet meant that country from which no traveler *can* return. All other journeys a traveler can abandon if he be dissatisfied with what he finds at his journey's end, but from beyond the bourn of Death no traveler returns. If once he reaches that undiscovered country he is a prisoner; he must become an inhabitant; his sojourn is not a visit that he can end at will, but a compulsory residence; nor can he send back any account of it, or of its people. In this it differs from all other countries, and in this sense it is undiscovered, unknown. Hamlet does not forget that his father had come from hell to speak with him, but he does not consider this the return of a traveler: it was only a momentary release from confinement. This explanation seems necessary to confirm the belief that Shakespeare thoughtfully considered the Fourth Soliloquy, and the changes he made from the first conception of it.

XVI.

WITH any interpretation of the Fourth Soliloquy, I do not see how critics have persuaded themselves to believe that the same mind that gives expression to these grand and beautiful thoughts, in words that echo the feeling of every world-weary mind, can in a moment *assume* and *feign* the rudeness and cruelty of Hamlet's tauntings of Ophelia. Nothing can excuse them except the belief that they are wrung from his tortured heart by the thought that Ophelia, Polonius, and the king are all combined in a league to force him to a marriage that the revelation of the ghost has made forever impossible. But Hamlet, when he comes to the lobby obedient to his uncle's summons, has forgotten Ophelia; has forgotten that he means to separate himself from her; he thinks only of his new-made plan, speaking his thoughts aloud. In his surprise, when he first perceives the maiden there, the habit of his happier hours controls his tongue, and he breaks off his graver speech with the tender words:

> Soft you now!
> The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
> Be all my sins remember'd.

The spell still controls him when, in reply to her timorous greeting—

> Good my lord,
> How does your lordship for this many a day?

he answers:

> I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

But it is rudely broken by her succeeding speech:

> My lord, I have remembrances of yours,
> That I have longed long to re-deliver;
> I pray you, now receive them,

Ophelia has brought these little gifts without the knowledge of her father. There was a sort of prescience in her heart that told her Hamlet might be eternally estranged, and her maidenly pride had found a way to retreat from the interview without exposing itself to absolute rout and defeat, while at the same time it invited Hamlet to renew his vows of love. She would be the first to suggest the separation; if Hamlet objected to it, her happiness would be the greater. Her words recall to Hamlet all his recent determinations; he still adheres to them, but he had not meant to hurt the maid with speech. He thought that absence from her, and silence, would indicate his changed intentions, but now the subject is forced upon him, and he tries to avoid it and to save Ophelia by denial. He trusts to her belief in the report that he is mad, and answers:

> No, not I;
> I never gave you aught.

This is not only contrary to the truth, but it is contrary to the testimony that Ophelia is expecting to

furnish her two listeners, and she is forced to press the gifts on Hamlet :

> My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;
> And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed
> As made the things more rich: their perfume lost,
> Take these again; for to the noble mind
> Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind.

She hands them to him, with the words that breathe her satisfaction in so much accomplished :

> There, my lord.

There is both dignity and self-assertion in Ophelia's tender words. Hamlet is touched by the expressions that reveal her love, and, while he laughs off her contradiction, once more a passing doubt assails him as to whether he must, to keep his self-respect, abandon so fair an epitome of youth and love. He asks her :

> Ha, ha! Are you honest?

Honest does not carry the same meaning as when Hamlet employed it to Polonius : it differs as does *honor* when we apply it to women or to men. It means here,

> Are you virtuous?

and so Ophelia understands it, and shows her understanding in her exclamation of shocked surprise :

> My lord?

Hamlet perceives her emotion, and looking on her face he answers his own question by another :

> Are you fair?

Ophelia, alarmed at she knows not what, responds:

What means your lordship?

and he replies:

That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

And he mentally continues:

[for you are of such a natural disposition that if you be exposed to temptation you will inevitably succumb to it.]

This is the same thought he had before expressed to Polonius:

Have you a daughter? . . . Let her not walk i' the sun: conception is a blessing: but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to't.

To Hamlet's spoken words Ophelia replies:

Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

and Hamlet substantially repeats his assertion:

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was some time a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. [the time in which I have discovered the ruin my mother's beauty wrought upon her honesty.]

Thinking on the happy time when he had believed her innocent, he adds:

I did love you once.

Oph. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

The use of this word *indeed*, by the tone it imparts to the spoken reply, shows to a sensitive ear that

hope is stirring in Ophelia's breast, but Hamlet's next words paralyze it forever:

You should not have believed me; [I myself hardly believe it. I doubt everything. I doubt you, and love that doubts is not true love. I doubt if I have the virtue of constancy, my mother did not have it. I incline to be virtuous, but am not sure I shall continue so,] for virtue can not so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: [*i.e.*, of our old stock] I loved you not.

With gentle submission to the inevitable, Ophelia answers:

I was the more deceived.

Poor child! Hamlet has disarranged her relations to the universe: if she is deceived in what her soul was so united to, how can she believe that any less essential thing is what it seems? Hamlet's tenderness tries to make Ophelia understand that union with him is not desirable, at the same time that his jealous love seeks to separate her from all other men.

Get thee to a nunnery:

he says. This does not seem to him a cruel sentence; he has not found the world so lovely that he wants to linger in it; a nunnery to him means safety and peace, and he counsels Ophelia:

Get thee to a nunnery: [where thou wilt be the bride of heaven alone. Marry no one] why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?

[Do not desire to be the mother of others like me.] We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery.

Then, suddenly remembering that believing him to be an arrant knave, Polonius has removed Ophelia from his society, he perceives that, ignoring his rudeness of the day before, she is here, in the royal castle, alone, away from her own house, not in his mother's apartments but in the public lobby where she might expect to meet him whom her father has forbidden her to see. The tender of the presents shows that it was a planned meeting on Ophelia's part; still her father may be with her, she may have come with him? and Hamlet looks around him for Polonius, and not discovering him he asks:

Where's your father?

Not suspecting what his thoughts have been, Ophelia answers, it may be with a hesitating tongue:

At home, my lord.

There is no reason to believe that Hamlet suspects this to be a lie; his reply does not show it; it discloses only his feeling toward the man whom he knows to be his uncle's tool, the man who shut Ophelia away from him,—the man who with so little cause thinks him insane:

Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house.

But in looking for Polonius, Hamlet has been reminded that he came to the lobby to meet *Claudius*, who had "closely" sent for him: instead he has

found *Ophelia.* He instantly conceives, what is the truth, that collusion between the king and Ophelia has brought her hither. Her answer:

At home, my lord.

shows him, as he supposes, that Ophelia is capable, on Claudius's suggestion, of deceiving her father and disobeying him, of coming unattended and alone to the castle for the ostensible purpose of returning gifts that she could at any time return by messenger, but really with the design to wring from him a new expression of his love. This answer, as indicating Ophelia's duplicity, and her understanding with Claudius, gives to his vigilant jealousy the testimony he has so long been seeking. She *is* not honest! She *will* prove untrue! He has at last received the *proof* that his mind sought yet dreaded to admit. In a sudden paroxysm of grief and despair he breaks away, saying only:

Farewell!

Ophelia's prayer:

O, help him, yon sweet heavens!

enrages him, and he turns and exhibits the involuntary disorder of his soul. How dare she, who has brought him to this misery, appeal in his behalf to heaven! Can she not see that though he may seem mad to others he is not so in fact, but is driven to his conduct in great part by her weakness and lack of principle? Unhappy Hamlet! he is nearer loss of reason now than ever before; he is alienated from his nobler self. His rage breaks its bounds, he can not control the tumult of his thoughts, and no longer

restrained by the hope that Ophelia may be absolutely upright, he overwhelms her with the waters of his indignation:

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. [thou hast that within thy blood which must expose thee to it.] Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men [men as wise as I] know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

Ophelia, believing herself in the presence of a madman, excuses and compassionates him, and prays again:

O heavenly powers, restore him!

and Hamlet turns once more, partly in self-justification:

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. (*i.e.*, you dance affectedly, you walk carelessly, you speak indistinctly and with affectation, and you give foolish names to God's creatures, and make your negligence of restraint appear to come from ignorance: these are the wiles and snares by which you worthless women entrap honest men and delude them into marriage with you.) Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery go.

This statement to Ophelia, *It hath made me mad*, is only the exaggeration of a lover who feels how much of his misery arises from the misconduct of his mistress. It has been echoed by hundreds of

lovers, before and since, without exciting a doubt as to their absolute sanity. Hamlet's meaning is:

[This conflict in my soul, which you believe is madness, does not arise from your repulse of my love but from the constitutional duplicity of womankind: my mother's exhibition of it has enlightened me, and I see in you the potentiality of all that exists in her.] I'll no more on't. *It* hath made me mad. I say we'll have no more marriages.

As Hamlet leaves Ophelia after this scathing denunciation, she forgets that her father and the king have listened to it, she only mourns over the dethronement of her lover's reason and her own consequent unhappiness. She agrees with Hamlet's general strictures on womankind, but thinks that nothing but mental alienation could have licensed him to express them. She says:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

Except her troubled exclamations at the play, these are the last words we hear Ophelia speak until madness has deprived her utterances of their true value, and they live in our memories and echo in our ears when we next see her seeking the "beau-

teous majesty of Denmark." When Polonius and the king enter from their retirement, even Polonius's mercenary heart is touched by Ophelia's grief. He allows her unnoticed to indulge it, while Claudius says:

> Love! his affections do not that way tend;
> Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,
> Was not like madness.

Why will not critics accept these words as evidence? Why will they insist that Hamlet either was mad, or counterfeited madness to alienate Ophelia and reconcile her to a separation from him? Claudius says "what he spake was not like madness." Ophelia believed it was, but the belief had been suggested to her, and her self-respect could provide no other interpretation of Hamlet's harsh words. Claudius, whose guilt made him clear-sighted, and we, who know so much more than he, know that disgust with womankind in general, and Gertrude and Ophelia in particular, was the inspiration for Hamlet's words.

It may be objected that in the foregoing conversation I have inserted much more than there is any justification for. But "Shakespeare wrote to be acted and not to be read." In the acting are included pauses that are only indicated in the text, but which are often more eloquent than words. Warburton said: "This wonderful man had an art, not only of acquainting his audience with what his actors *say*, but with what they *think*." The pauses in which Hamlet pursues his distracted thoughts

are filled with meaning for the thoughtful hearer, and the interpretation of these pauses both here and elsewhere may be, and I believe is, that which I have given them.

While hiding, Claudius had heard Hamlet's threat, "all but one shall live." He realizes that this was aimed at him, and his determination is straightway taken to send his nephew into England, or maybe he already decides to send him on a longer journey. Whatever his intention, he tells Polonius that he means the prince shall at once be sent to England, in the hope that change of air may benefit him. Polonius fears the result of separating Hamlet and Ophelia, he can not renounce the hope that Hamlet's "grief sprung from neglected love;" therefore, knowing Hamlet's affection for the queen, and hers for him, remembering that she has never assented when her son is pronounced mad, believing that she may be the confidante of the prince, he suggests that after the play that night, when it might be supposed Hamlet and his mother could meet and speak with no fear of being overheard, the queen shall send for Hamlet and "all alone entreat him to show his grief." His idea is to hide and listen to their conference, hoping that Hamlet will proclaim his love for Ophelia. Claudius, whose crimes make him suspicious of even his nearest and dearest, assents to this scheme, and afterward induces Gertrude to perform her necessary part in it. The fact that Claudius is willing that Polonius shall hear Hamlet's private confes-

sion to his mother, helps us to determine the extent of the councilor's complicity in his master's crimes. Guilty as the king knew himself to be, and fearful that Hamlet had some knowledge, or at least a strong suspicion, of his guilt, he would have withheld the lord chamberlain from the private conference of the prince and Gertrude, if Polonius had not already known all that Claudius feared might there be revealed. In this case too we have to divine the thoughts of the actors. Neither Claudius nor Polonius utters them, but we see what the former fears, and we appreciate the service that Polonius will render him, when he repeats the revelation Hamlet makes. Polonius is completely the tool of Claudius when he is needed for any dirty work, and he, in turn, uses his sovereign for his purposes. Each understands and has taken the measure of the other, and Polonius presumes on his knowledge of Claudius's depraved nature when he invites him to become an eavesdropper, and asks for a commission to listen in the closet of the queen.

The report of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the interview of Hamlet and Ophelia, and the conversation between Claudius and the old councilor, each succeeded the other early in the day. No other action is represented until the evening. We know that Hamlet has finally renounced Ophelia, and we recognize that the result of the mock-play, if he present it, will assure him that he has not erred in his condemnation of his mother and of the king.

We do not know what his decision will be—he interrupted himself in the consideration of the subject—but his line of reasoning would naturally conduct him to a determination to apply the touchstone. We believe that he will put the matter to the test, in the way he had devised, and this belief is confirmed on his next appearance.

XVII.

WHEN we next see Hamlet, he enters a hall in the castle—probably the apartment in which we saw him first—in company with the players, and continues the instructions he had already given the First Player about the inserted speech, thus informing the audience that the play is *to be*. His words do not show any agitation, or incoherence, he exhibits no undue haste, but, with his nerves perfectly under control, he gives the players a lesson in the art of elocution. As he dismisses them Polonius enters, with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, to tell him that the king and queen are ready to hear the play; he sends the three to hasten the preparations of the players, and thus secures a means to speak without auditors to Horatio, to whom he had already told the circumstances of his father's death, but not, I am sure, his suspicions about his mother. After justifying the demand he is about to make, by assuring Horatio that he wears him in his heart of hearts and dearly loves him, he asks of his reciprocal friendship a favor. He says:

> There is a play to-night before the king;
> One scene of it comes near the circumstance
> Which I have told thee of my father's death:
> I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,

Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle: if his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note;
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after we will both our judgements join
In censure of his seeming.

Horatio, who is not so absolute a believer in the reliability of the ghost, falls in with Hamlet's humor, and says:

Well, my lord:
If he steal aught the whilst this play is playing,
And 'scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

The Danish march is heard, and Hamlet says:

They are coming to the play; I must be idle:
Get you a place.

The king and queen, Polonius and Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, these and many more, enter and take their places to see the play. Claudius greets Hamlet with treacherous cordiality, but Hamlet disdains to feign friendliness, and the report of his insanity furnishes him with a most effectual means to disguise his feelings. Not against the king, however; the king knows that Hamlet is not mad, and the insolence of his answer stings him, but he turns it aside, appearing not to see its pertinence. Hamlet next salutes Polonius. It is his part now to cultivate the belief in his madness; he sees that it may be useful to him so soon as the story of the ghost is confirmed. Hamlet turns to Polonius, and,

as usual, begins to use him for his mirth, but interrupts himself to ask:

Be the players ready?

Rosencrantz replies:

Ay, my lord; they stay upon your patience.

Gertrude then speaks to Hamlet. She knows the others consider him insane, for in a court such news flies swiftly; he is not courted as when his father was alive; his reply to the king a moment before showed that he is still unreconciled to the loss of his kingdom, and her mother's heart speaks for him, and tells her to rehabilitate him, at least in the consideration of the courtiers. She says:

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

but Hamlet answers:

No, good mother, here's metal more attractive.

Think how this speech must wring Ophelia's heart. She has had time to realize that Hamlet has spurned her and abused her, in the hearing of the king and of her father; she has recalled the bitter words he used, and she fears his madness may allow him now to flout her, in the face of all the court. She does not hope this honeyed speech may be an indication of returning love—her hope is dead—and when Hamlet asks:

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

she says:

No, my lord.

Even were she not possessed by the feeling of outraged modesty, she would prefer that he should

place himself at a greater distance; self-control will be hard enough under any circumstances, but close proximity to her lost lover is almost unendurable. Hamlet, however, disregards this feeling, and says:

I mean, my head upon your lap?

and Ophelia replies quickly:

Ay, my lord. [I know what your meaning was.]

but Hamlet wilfully misunderstands this answer, and, taking it for an assent to his request, he lies down at her feet, and begins the conversation which we hear, though king and court do not, as it is spoken with Ophelia apart. To them he wishes still to seem the lover of the maiden; he thinks the king believes he loves her, and he delights to deceive Claudius and old Polonius. For the audience, although Hamlet has made choice of his seat with flattering words, they know he did not mean them, and they hear his conversation with Ophelia, which indicates the extreme of familiar contemptuousness and disrespect. I wish that Hamlet had not thus abused her, and I thank our modern Hamlets that they do not now compel us to listen to the repetition of this coarseness on the stage. It is a blot on Hamlet's fair escutcheon. Ophelia tries to make him speak only of the play, but nothing can screen her from his dreadful witticisms. Had she not believed him mad, and not responsible for his wild words, she might have gone to Gertrude for protection, but her love forgave him every blow he dealt her, for she thought it was his madness prompted them. We can not excuse Hamlet as

she did; the only palliation of his fault is this: he intended to make Ophelia fully comprehend that his conversation with her in the morning was not the ravings of frenzy only: he meant so to talk to her that she should become disgusted, and want to separate herself from him. He insulted her at every opportunity, but his own words to the queen after the play, he might as fitly have used now: "I must be cruel only to be kind." While his abuse really manifested his opinion of Ophelia, it was regard for her that made him express, instead of concealing it. He hoped she would excuse it from her belief in his madness, but he desired to make her think that madness only revealed his true nature. He manifested incoherence purposely in his conversation with her, so that she might finally have the refuge of this belief. He wanted, if possible, to alienate her affection from him in order to save her from suffering under the separation his self-respect had decreed.

The mock-play goes on. The dumb show preceding it alarms the king, but he controls himself, only asking Hamlet, when the lines become very pertinent:

> Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?

Finally the crucial moment arrives. Hamlet's impatience compels him to cry out:

> Begin, murderer; pox, leave thy damnable faces, and begin.

then, fearing this confession of deep interest may excite surprise, he adds:

> Come: 'the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.'

He hopes by this ranting garbled quotation from the old play of Richard the Third, to make his whole outcry seem a piece of unmeaning bombast. There is yet a possibility that his uncle is innocent, and, in that case, there is no reason why Hamlet should feel any undue agitation at the death of a king, killed by *poison* while sleeping in a garden; therefore he controls himself, and listens while Lucianus repeats his invocation, before pouring the poison into the sleeper's ears. Then, with his eyes riveted to the king's face, speaking loud enough for Claudius to hear, by a mighty effort he calmly continues, to Ophelia, his former exposition of the play:

He poisons him i' the garden for's estate. His name's Gonzago: the story is extant, and writ in choice Italian: you shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

I am sure that in speaking these words Hamlet showed his agitation only by his clenched hands and fixed eyes. He continued to gaze on Claudius, who slowly rose, as Lucianus's guarded motions renewed before him the particulars of his crime, and, even when the king was fully on his feet, paralyzed by the fear that his crime was discovered, Hamlet still continued to gaze upon him, waiting for some word of confession. It is Ophelia who first, after Hamlet, notices the king's agitation; all the others are so intent on the slow approaches and cautious movements of the player, that they do not observe the disquietude of their sovereign. Ophelia's wondering exclamation:

The king rises.

startles Hamlet from the intentness of his observation, and his sensation of triumph at having finally confirmed the story of the ghost expresses itself in the almost exultant cry:

What, frighted with false fire!

That cry proclaims war to the knife between the king and Hamlet, but the play, without it, would have done so, and he is now prepared to meet the issue. He knows the apparition was his father's spirit, and at last he feels ready, at any cost, to obey its dread command. Nothing he can now say to his mother, nothing he can do to his uncle will be more than they deserve.

XVIII.

THE courtiers go out with the king; and Hamlet, left alone with Horatio, turns to him, and, in some rhymed lines, that are intended to seem a part of some old ballad recalled by the running away of all the others, gives a partial vent to his so long controlled excitement. Now, as after the revelation of the ghost, Hamlet can not express himself in measured words. He, and Horatio, both, are in such a state of exaltation that they can not instantly descend to sober consultation. Hamlet seems to ignore the ultimate result of the lines inserted in the mock-play, and asks only if he has not proved his qualification for "a fellowship in a cry of players." Again he quotes a foolish rhyme, which gives Horatio a chance to make a pointed allusion to Claudius, and thus bring the subject they must next consider immediately before them. Hamlet then shudderingly says:

> O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?

and Horatio, the balance-wheel, more calmly replies:

> Very well, my lord.
> Upon the talk of the poisoning?

continues the poor prince; and Horatio gently interrupts him, saying:

> I did very well note him.

Thus far the conversation is a not unnatural expression of the feelings possessing both Horatio and Hamlet, but the succeeding words seem to disclose more than this; they seem inexplicable on any other theory than absolute loss of reason in Hamlet. It does not seem that a sane man would start away from a serious and confidential conversation with his bosom friend, and suddenly exclaim:

> Ah, ha! Come, some music! come, the recorders!
> For if the king like not the comedy,
> Why then, belike, he likes it not, perdy.
> Come, some music!

yet this Hamlet does, and thus he furnishes to the advocates of the theory of his madness their strongest argument against his sanity. How can we, who know that he was always sane, explain these "wild and whirling words?" The Folio and the First Quarto explain them for us. In them both, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are represented as entering while Hamlet is speaking to Horatio, and before he says, "Ah ha! Come, some music." If we recall the conversation the prince held with his two schoolfellows when Polonius's entrance cut short their talk about his madness, we shall remember that, as Polonius appeared, Hamlet said aloud, and meaning the old man should hear him, although his speech had no connection with anything he had said before:

> "You say right, sir: o' Monday morning; 'twas so indeed."

This case is a parallel to that. Hamlet is talking to Horatio on a subject he can discuss with him only;

he sees the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and pretending that his speech with Horatio is of no importance, he breaks off, as if the subject was an indifferent one, and calls for music; then, fearing they may have heard some of his last words, he boldly introduces his uncle's name in the careless rhyme:

> For if the king like not the comedy,

[comedy he calls it!]

> Why then, belike, he likes it not, perdy.

It is very easy to see how the stage direction, *Enter Rosincrance and Guildensterne*, has shifted from its proper place, (mistakes in the placing of the stage directions is the most frequent fault made by the old editors, and by modern ones) but it is difficult to realize that it is not now restored. The early editors, those preceding 1770, seem to have placed it where it should be, but in all modern editions I have consulted it is dislocated. In the First Quarto the lines read:

> *Hor.** I *Horatio*, i'le take the Ghofts word
> For more than all the coyne in *Denmarke*.
>
> *Enter Roffencraft and Gilderftone.*
>
> *Roff.* Now my lord, how if't with you?
> *Ham.* And if the king like not the tragedy,
> Why then belike he likes it not perdy.
> *Roff.* We are very glad to fee your grace fo pleasant,
> My good lord, let vs againe intreate
> To know of you the ground and caufe of your diftemperature.

**Hor.* is evidently a mistake, for Hamlet addresses Horatio.

The Second Quarto reads as our modern editions do:

Ham. Vpon the talke of the poyſning.
Hor. I did very well note him.
Ham. Ah ha, come ſome muſique, come the Recorders,
For if theKing like not the Comedie,
Why then belike he likes it not perdy.
Come, ſome muſique.

Enter Rofencraus and Guyldensterne.

Guyl. Good my Lord, voutſafe me a word with you.

The Folio says:

Ham. Upon the talke of the poysoning?
Hora. I did verie well note him.

Enter Rosincrance and Guildensterne.

Ham. Oh, ha? Come some Musicke. Come y^e^ Recorders:
For if the King like not the Comedie,
Why then belike he likes it not perdie.
Come some Musicke.
Guild. Good my Lord, vouchſafe me a word with you.

These are the three authorities from which our modern editions are made up: two agree in making the entrance of the two spies precede Hamlet's sudden call for music, and his rhyme about the king. The Folio, which is assumed to present the play in its most perfect form, makes the entrance of the spies precede the call for music, and prints the words "Oh, ha?" with an interrogation point, as much as to say, 'Oh, you are there, are you?' and then follow the words, "Come, some music." I think this is the reading we ought to adopt. Hamlet's call for music, and his abrupt breaking away from a serious conversation without apparent cause, has

been a stumbling-block that the believers in his sanity have found it impossible to remove: they knew that he was sane, and they have stuck to that, though unable to explain away what looked like madness. This reading furnishes the explanation of these words in this place, and the introduction of a like irrelevant speech in the conversation with Polonius, the day before, furnishes the precedent for them.

The "spaniels," as Marshall calls them, though he thus dishonors a most honest dog, have come to summon Hamlet to his mother's closet. They have not yet been at court two days, but they have plainly seen already that Hamlet's star is a descending one; they have in this short time advanced from the position of school-fellow and friend to that of guardian, and they now appear as mentors, ready to tutor Hamlet for his late disrespect to the king and queen; transcending their office, which was only to summon him to his mother's presence. His sarcastic, ironical answers to their impertinent remarks disconcert them, and almost touch their hearts; they at least remind Rosencrantz that Hamlet has a heart, and, to entrap his friend he appeals to it, saying:

> My lord, you once did love me.

Hamlet's reply is exactly what the spies deserve:

> So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.

The first part of the answer—so I do still—disarms their anxiety by asserting that his love still cherishes them; and the end, with its adjuration,

not "by this hand" which Hamlet honors, but "by these pickers and stealers"—the insignia of a thief—again arouses it. The union of earnestness and mockery so distorts the answer that its hearers are disconcerted by it, and are compelled to let the subject pass, and finally to proclaim their office by asking:

Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? you do, surely, bar the door upon your own liberty, if you deny your griefs to your friend.

This is a threat, but Hamlet does not instantly resent it; he seems to answer Rosencrantz with the grave words:

Sir, I lack advancement.

Guildenstern had withdrawn from the conversation in anger, when Hamlet, with such mock earnestness, ironically asserted, "my wit's diseased," but, when the recorders were brought in he drew near to the prince again. Just what his intention was we can not tell, but Hamlet, resenting his sullen exhibition of disrespect and ill-temper, carried the war at once into Africa, and rebuked him for pressing so close upon him. Guildenstern, surprised by the attack, tried to evade it by a counter complaint—a whine:

O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

meaning, 'as my duty, in your opinion, made me too bold, so you now think my love, which led me to come near to you, is too unmannerly. You did not treat me kindly when I tried to do my duty and deliver your mother's message, and you are again

displeased because my love led me to approach your side too closely.' Hamlet disdains to answer to this accusation, and puts it aside with gentleness and self-control; and then, urging his two keepers to play upon the pipe, he discovers, even to their jaundiced minds, how unworthy they must seem to every honest man. In all this interview Hamlet exhibits perfect self-control, a quick and biting wit, an honesty of purpose that will not disguise itself in lies, and a scathing sarcasm that scorches every spot it touches. The exaltation of his spirits continues through it all; every sense seems sharper and more active than ever before; and, when Polonius enters, impatient because the two friends have stayed so long, Hamlet greets him with a quick, "God bless you, sir!" and, as soon as he has discharged himself of his message, begins to turn him into ridicule; partly for the gratification of his own feeling against him, and partly to show the audience how thorough a courtier the old chamberlain is. Polonius would not for the world displease his son-in-law, the crown prince—before he has secured him—and he agrees with each vagary of Hamlet's vision, seeing first a camel, then a weasel, then a whale, where Hamlet points them out upon the canvas of the sky. Having convinced himself that Polonius will lie to humor him, Hamlet indicates to the audience that this was his intent in pretending to see these cloud-monsters. He says:

They fool me to the top of my bent.

and then, resuming his native dignity, he dismisses the chamberlain by a repetition of the answer he had already given him:

I will come by and by.

Turning then to the players who had brought in the recorders, and to Horatio, ignoring the two spies, he quietly says:

Leave me, friends.

and all, passing out, leave him at last alone. His spirits are falling; a grim determination takes the place of his late elation, and his only desire is to make, or seize, an opportunity to kill the king. He wonders that his father's spirit does not again appear to urge him to the vengeance which he now believes is so well deserved, but he knows that the certainty of his uncle's guilt has banished compunction from his mind forever. He says:

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! Now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

XIX.

UNTIL now Hamlet has avoided the queen. His love, and his contempt, his natural reverence for his mother, and his obligation to his father, have so distressed him while he was undetermined whether the ghost spoke truth, that he could not decide on any bearing toward her that would not either express a lie, or else reveal his doubts of her purity. Now his way is clear. She is an erring woman, and his first duty, to his father and to her, is to replace her feet in the path of virtue. He goes to the interview with his mother feeling that the blessing of Heaven accompanies him, and that he has received his commission not only from his earthly father, but from his Heavenly one; no doubt or fear assails him; he goes believing her more guilty than she really is, thinking she had assented to the murder of his father. In the First Quarto it is made clear that this was not the case, though from the Folio we can only infer her innocence.

While Hamlet is going from the hall in which the play was acted to his mother's apartments, we see Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have returned to the king. Claudius has recovered his self-control, and has elaborated his scheme for self-protection: he intends to send Hamlet at once to England in charge of his two school-fellows, who shall bear a

mandate from Denmark to England, desiring Hamlet's instant murder the moment he arrives in the island. He bids Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to prepare immediately for the voyage, and they hasten from his presence to arm themselves for it. As I have said before, Shakespeare leaves us in doubt whether or not the two friends knew the contents of the letter they were to bear. I incline to think they did not know them, and Horatio's impartial mind seems to have held the same opinion. When Hamlet, later, tells him how he had changed the packets and sent his school-fellows to their death, Horatio says, with a touch of deprecating sadness:

> So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't,

and Hamlet strives to reassure him and justify himself by saying:

> Why, man, they did make love to this employment.

I think they did not know the contents of the packet, else would they not have delivered the commission after Hamlet had escaped from them; but I believe that had Claudius exposed his plan to them (which he was much too cautious to do), and given them his reasons for it, they would still have been the willing instruments of his villainy. They really were convinced that Hamlet was mad, and believed as Rosencrantz said, that,

> The single and peculiar life is bound,
> With all the strength and armour of the mind,
> To keep itself from noyance; but much more
> That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest
> The lives of many.

As the two sycophants leave Claudius to prepare themselves for the voyage, Polonius enters, and, after telling the king that Hamlet is going to his mother's closet, he also goes to hide and listen to their conversation.

When Polonius departs the king is at last at liberty to throw aside the mask of comparative indifference he has so bravely worn, and, to our surprise, we see that it does not cover a nature entirely callous. Claudius's conscience is awake to the knowledge that he owes a heavy debt to the King of kings. The simulated murder in the mock-play has recalled all the particulars of his own guilt, and he sees his crime in the light in which it must be viewed by God and man. No fear of earthly punishment distresses him, he feels that he is strong enough to cope with all the powers of earth; but conscience makes a coward of him, and the dread of something after death—the inevitable retribution of a just God—cows his imperial spirit.

He knows the way that he must take to restore himself to amity with heaven, but it is a strait and narrow one, through which he can carry no ravished kingdom, no adulterous queen, and these he is not ready to resign. He knows he is not ready to repent—repentance entails restoration—but this man's wicked nature is so strong, and has so long controlled the forces surrounding him, that he now attempts to juggle with his Maker and his own conscience. He kneels to pray for mercy, having first determined not to pay the price exacted for

it; hoping some royal road to heaven may yet be found for him; hoping that even without repentance "All may be well."

While Claudius is on his knees apparently lost in supplication, Hamlet passes through the apartment to reach his mother's. He perceives the king, as he supposes, rapt in prayer, and his first impulse is to kill him there, while he is unconscious of his justly merited doom. He rushes toward him drawing his sword, but the swift thought that his uncle is in communion with heaven, and that a sudden death might only make that communion more intimate and perfect, stays his hand.

It is not doubt or cowardice that now withholds Hamlet, else could he not have killed Polonius supposing him to be the king hidden behind the arras. His former fear has chiefly been that by killing him he might commit injustice, but he is at last assured that his uncle deserves death. This thought restrains him—that Claudius might escape damnation if despatched while his soul, the immortal part of him, is united in prayer with its Maker.

It has been objected that Shakespeare here makes Hamlet too bloodthirsty: critics contend that it is more than a legitimate revenge that would destroy both soul and body; but Hamlet did not think so. He had too long thought of the ghost as sometimes the devil himself, sometimes his father's suffering spirit, to be willing that Claudius should escape one tittle of the punishment to which his father had been sent. Besides, Shakespeare found the precedent for this "fiendishness," as Dr. John-

son thought it, on page 303 of the old *Hystorie*, in these words of Hamlet:

And reason requireth, that euen as trayterously they then caused their prince to bee put to death, that with the like (nay well much more) iustice they should pay the interest of their fellonious actions.

You know (Madame) how Hother your grandfather, and father to the good King Roderick, hauing vanquished Guimon, caused him to be burnt, for that the cruel vilain had done the like to his lord Geuare, whom he betrayed in the night time.

and on p. 317 he says, just after he has killed the wicked king:

now go thy wayes, and when thou commest in hell, see that thou forget not to tell thy brother (whom thou trayterously slewest) that it was his sonne that sent thee thither with the message.

Hamlet was not even willing to give his uncle a grave; he advised the Danes:

burne his abhominable body, boyle his lasciuious members, and cast the ashes of him that hath beene hurtfull to all the world, into the ayre.

This is the state of mind Shakespeare bestows on our young Hamlet, who knew his father had been sent to hell, and was unwilling to allow his murderer a chance to go to heaven.

In the *Hystorie*, on page 287, is also found the explanation of some other of his words on this occasion; words which, critics say, and rightly too, are not

justified by anything in the play. While Hamlet is contemplating his uncle he says:

He took my father grossly full of bread.

This information was derived, not from the ghost, nor from the First Quarto. The First Quarto says:

He tooke my father fleeping.

Shakespeare, when he re-wrote the play, found the statement in the following lines of the old novel:

But Fengon, . . . Horuendile, his brother being at a banquet with his friends, sodainely set vpon him, where he slewe him, etc.

Must we not admit that the influence of the *Hystorie* on this Tragedy has too contemptuously been set aside?

Hamlet does spare his uncle when he finds him on his knees in prayer, and critics find in this delay only another justification of their assertion that irresolution and inabillty to act controlled him. Let us suppose that he had killed the king then, what would have been the result? Hamlet would have been seized, the indications of his madness would all have been produced against him, and he would have been confined in Bedlam, if he had succeeded in escaping instant death. This would have been the immediate result; another would have been that which Hamlet's fears had foreseen as soon as he received the revelation. Gertrude, being unconvinced that the king was a murderer, would have believed her son insane, and would have mourned Claudius as his innocent victim. Claudius's death would be useless to secure the repose of the

ghost, or to effect the fulfilling of his command—Gertrude would still be united in heart to her seducer. But this would not have been represented for us: we know it would ensue, but the play would end with Hamlet's removal; there would no longer exist material to continue it. Let us be thankful then that Hamlet withheld his hand, even though the reason he advanced for doing so was a heathenish one: we should condemn him still more had any fear for his own ultimate safety influenced him. From the moment the king rises "frighted with false fire," Hamlet is ready and eager to obey the ghost's command; he is prepared in mind, and body, and in spirit, to kill the king, but killing him would not fulfill the obligation imposed upon him: he *must* make Gertrude see the error of her ways, and his first action, after the play, is directed to that end. He allows the king to live until he shall be "about some act that hath no relish of salvation in't," and proceeds to his mother's closet.

XX.

THE fourth scene of the third act discovers Gertrude and Polonius in conversation. Polonius is urging her to reprove her son sharply, but I think Gertrude did not know that the chamberlain meant to listen to this reproof. It is true that in most of the modern editions he says:

I'll sconce me even here;

but there is not, in my opinion, sufficient warrant for this change from the Second Quarto and the Folio. In both of these he says:

I'll silence me even here.

It is true that in the First Quarto Polonius directly addresses Gertrude, saying:

Madame, I heare yong Hamlet comming,
I'le ſhrowde my ſelfe behinde the Arras.

and, in the First Quarto, in the scene in which the plan is first expressed, it is to the queen and not to the king, that he says:

Madam, ſend you in haſte to ſpeake with him,
And I my ſelfe will ſtand behind the Arras,
There queſtion you the cauſe of all his griefe,
And then in loue and nature vnto you, hee'le tell you all:
My Lord, how thinke you on't?

It is on the authority of this knowledge of Gertrude, expressed in Quarto,, that modern critics

have changed Polonius's words, but the Folio should be our guide, especially when it agrees with the Second Quarto, which we are absolutely sure was Shakespeare's work, and when we make any change from it we are bound to be consistent. In the Folio and in the Second Quarto, Polonius addresses the king—not Gertrude—when Gertrude is not present, and suggests that he shall be a hidden witness to the interview between her son and her. Afterward, in a passage that has no parallel in the First Quarto, Polonius attributes to the king the inception of the scheme, saying:

> My lord, he's going to his mother's closet:
> Behind the arras I'll convey myself,
> To hear the process; I'll warrant she'll tax him home:
> And, as you said, and wisely was it said,
> 'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
> Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear
> The speech, of vantage. Fare you well, my liege:
> I'll call upon you ere you go to bed,
> And tell you what I know.

The idea which possesses both Claudius and the chamberlain is, that Gertrude, since Nature makes mothers partial, should be spied upon, so that if she does not divulge the subject of Hamlet's conversation it may yet be known. Shakespeare inserted this speech and made the change of idea from the First Quarto because the old *Hystorie*, p. 302, makes Gertrude say:

Thou seest there is not almost any man wherein thou mayest put thy trust, nor any woman to whom I dare vtter the least part of my secrets, that

would not presently report it to thine aduersarie, who, although in outward shew he dissembleth to love thee, the better to injoy his pleasures of me, yet hee distrusteth and feareth meé for thy sake, and is not so simple to be easily perswaded, that thou art a foole or mad.

Polonius hastens from the king to tell the queen that Hamlet is at hand: he enters Gertrude's closet, and hurriedly delivers his advice. She too, is nervous, desiring that Polonius shall not hear any part of her interview with her son, and fearing that Hamlet may come in before he leaves. Her impatience of his presence is so plain that he retreats saying, *not*,

I'll sconce me even here,

but,

I'll silence me even here;

that is;

[I have done; I'll talk no more now.]

Shakespeare himself made the change from the First to the Second Quarto, and made other changes to accord with it, and it seems to me that when his meaning is so plain he should not be "improved" by anybody. The choice of words, and so of facts, is important because it helps us to judge of Claudius's and of Gertrude's characters.

If Claudius places Polonius here without the knowledge and consent of Gertrude, it proves that he suspects the queen, and is not absolutely sure even of her affection for him: it proves that "his shameful lust" was one of the tools by which he

gratified his unscrupulous ambition. His words to Laertes—

> The queen his mother
> Lives almost by his looks; and for myself—
> My virtue or my plague, be it either which—
> She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
> That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
> I could not but by her—

do not ring true, and all his treatment of Hamlet indicates indifference to the queen's desires. If we know that, distrustful of Gertrude, he allows Polonius to spy upon her and Hamlet, we are prepared for the callousness he afterwards exhibits when he plans to kill her son, and calmly sees her quaff the poisoned draught.

And Gertrude? There could be no reason why Gertrude should want Polonius present though unseen. She did not believe her son was mad, and she was not afraid of him. She meant to rebuke Hamlet for his disrespect in allowing the production of the mock-play, which had publicly censured her for her second marriage, and she feared that her son, now that he had potentially broken his rule of silence, might defend himself, and, to do so, might again express his feelings at her unfaithfulness to his father. For her own sake she naturally was unwilling that Polonius should overhear their conversation, but, besides, she would have been a traitor to her son—whom, after all, she dearly loved—if, knowing it herself, she had allowed him to remain ignorant that any one was in hiding.

The *Hystorie* explicitly declares that neither Ger-

trude nor Hamlet knew that the chamberlain was a hidden listener, and I believe Shakespeare meant us to understand it so; but this belief will constrain the actors who personate them to alter their "business" in this scene.

I believe that Hamlet's mind was in a condition of great excitement and his nerves in a state of extreme sensibility, his muscles responding promptly and vigorously to any message from his brain. When the queen called for help, and Polonius cried out from behind the arras, Hamlet, instantly on hearing the cry, on an unformulated impulse, drew his sword and thrust it though the hanging in the direction of the sound. Polonius was hastening toward the opening through which he could reach the queen, and his onward motion, even as Hamlet lunged through the curtain, and his fall, must have wrenched the sword from the prince's hand. This action occupied only a moment, not much more time than was needed for Hamlet to cry:

How now! A rat?

and, as his sword is drawn from his grasp by Polonius's fall, Hamlet, turning towards his father's portrait, as if offering the result of his sword-thrust to him, should throw his arms heaven-ward with the triumphant cry:

Dead, for a ducat, dead!

He believes that the eavesdropper was the king, and that his task is accomplished. Claudius's presence here must prove to Gertrude that he is unworthy!

Hamlet should remain fixed in this attitude of prayer and thankfulness, while his mother runs to lift the arras, crying as she goes:

O me, what hast thou done?

The stage direction, *Lifts up the arras and discovers Polonius.*—is not found in the Quartos or the Folio: it has been inserted in Hamlet's part by modern editors, and inserted in the wrong place. The queen, not Hamlet, should lift the hanging, before she exclaims:

O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

I feel sure that thousands of wives and mothers, looking on at the play, have revolted at Gertrude's represented apathy when her son's undiscerning sword lets out this unknown life. Gertrude does not stand motionless; she runs toward the spot; she pushes back the hanging; her heart fears that Claudius has been pierced by Hamlet's blade; and, as she hastens to find out the truth, she expresses to the audience that she does not know who was in hiding, by the cry:

O me, what hast thou done?

To this question Hamlet replies:

Nay, I know not:

then, as his mother remains speechless, gazing upon the corse that is discovered to her eyes, but not to his, like lightning he reflects that but a moment since he had left his uncle absorbed in prayer; he had come instantly to his mother's chamber; there had been no time for Claudius to conceal himself:

the fear breaks in upon him that his exultation has been premature, and, unable to submit to the doubt, he turns toward Gertrude as she bends over the dead body of Polonius, calling out in his intolerable suspense:

Is it the king?

When Hamlet stands beside his mother, looking down on the dead councilor, she turns on him exclaiming:

O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

and he, disappointed because his blade has miscarried, instead of lamenting in words what his heart is mourning over, rebukes her for rebuking him. Then he stands speechless gazing upon the dead body of Ophelia's father,—dead by his hand; and through his mind courses the recollection of Polonius's action in placing the crown on Claudius's head; of his perverted judgment which led him to seclude Ophelia; of his officiousness; and, finally, the realization that Polonius was here, in his mother's closet—a spot that should have been a sanctuary—to spy upon her unhappy son as he exposed his anguished soul to her who should have been his surest confidante. Still, when he speaks, his words express not anger, but sorrow—sorrow seasoned by contempt.

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!

(he says)

I took thee for thy better: take thy fortune:
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger."

The sight of Gertrude's agitation recalls the object with which he had come to her, and which, alas! is not yet accomplished; and he dismisses all thought of the dead councilor, and of his own part in his death, and begins the work of leading his mother to repentance. Hamlet's was one of those excitable natures that could lash itself into a fury, and we see, as he proceeds in his arraignment of his mother, how his feelings are intensified. Gertrude has not believed her son was mad; but, when he seems to threaten her with violence and in a sudden access of frenzy kills the unseen eavesdropper, and finally holds converse with the "incorporal air," she is at last convinced that the others have been right, and expresses this in her heart-broken cry:

Alas, he's mad!

No one has such good reason now as Gertrude for believing her son insane, but Hamlet is able first to beat down and set aside this conclusion, and afterward to induce his mother to unite with him in imposing on the king the belief that he is really deranged,—a belief that she no longer entertains. She agrees to this, in part because Hamlet demands it, and in part to save him from the consequences she fears he has incurred in killing Polonius.

XXI.

A GREAT deal has been written about Shakespeare's intention in shutting Gertrude's senses to the presence of the ghost. It has been said that only Hamlet saw it, because its mission was to him alone; why then had Horatio and the sentinels seen and heard it on its previous appearances? It has been said that Gertrude's guilt shut her eyes to the presence of an inhabitant of the other world; but this was not a blessed spirit, a ministering angel? It has been said that the ghost was but a subjective one, the creation of Hamlet's heated brain; but Shakespeare need not make it visible to the audience in order to prove that Hamlet thought he saw it. I think we must conclude that the ghost was Shakespeare's creation, and that he governed it, and not the ghost Shakespeare; as when he introduced supernatural elements in other plays he created and controlled them. The witches in Macbeth, Banquo's ghost, the vision of the kings, Cæsar's ghost, these he operated as he pleased, revealing and concealing them as seemed best. In *The Tempest*, Act. III. Sc. III., Caliban and Stephano hear the voice of Ariel, while Trinculo hears nothing. This is a parallel case to Gertrude's insensibility, but we do not conclude that Trinculo was more wicked than Caliban, or his other companion. Gertrude did not hear the ghost

because Shakespeare chose that Hamlet, all alone, should separate her heart from Claudius, and return it to his father. Had she seen that father "in his habit as he lived," we could never measure the success achieved by the prince;—some of it must have been attributed to the apparition. But we know that Hamlet does not spare his mother until he has awakened her conscience, and made her see her own depravity—until she begs:

> O Hamlet, speak no more;
> Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct.
>
> . . . .
>
> O, speak to me no more;
> These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
> No more, sweet Hamlet!

There is a peculiar pathos in the appearance of the ghost at just this juncture of the play. During all the evening Hamlet has been thinking intently of his father, recalling and reviewing all the circumstances of the ghost's revelation, made two months before, but only now proved to be true. We can read what his thoughts were before he went to his mother's closet: his Fifth Soliloquy discloses them. He says:

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
> When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
> Contagion to this world;

and then he waits, listening, watching, and almost wishing that hell may again breathe out the unhappy spirit to whom he hopes at once to give the

rest so long denied it. The recognition of the suffering endured by his wronged father—suffering extended by his son, who had not been able, without proof, wholly to credit the accusation against his mother and his father's brother—so influences him that he cries out:

> Now could I drink hot blood,
> And do such bitter business as the day
> Would quake to look on.

There should be no doubt that Hamlet was ready then, and at every future moment of his life, to kill his uncle. He was even tempted to kill his mother too, but he remembered that more than vengeance was needed to give repose to his father's spirit: he *must* lead Gertrude to renounce her guilty love for the king.

In the light of our knowledge that this was Hamlet's condition of mind; when we reflect that he had just spared Claudius's life, because his death while at prayer would not have satisfied revenge, and had killed Polonius, believing that he was the king, engaged in an act that had "no relish of salvation in it;" when we perceive that, at this very moment, her son's words were like daggers in the queen's ears, it is pitiful to realize that the appearance of the ghost brought no relief to Hamlet, no commendation because he was so well accomplishing the most difficult part of his father's behest; that, on the contrary, Hamlet at once felt its antagonism and was startled into a sudden prayer for personal safety.

When the apparition first appeared to his friends and him, on the platform, Hamlet felt that all were equally threatened by its presence, and he prayed:

> Angels and ministers of grace defend *us!*

but on this second appearance the ghost's aspect is so different that he is filled with apprehension for himself, though not for his mother, and he prays:

> Save *me*, and hover o'er *me* with your wings,
> You heavenly guards!

Then, tremblingly, he asks:

> What would your gracious figure?

but the ghost does not reply. All its regard is fixed on Gertrude, and it yearns to be able to comfort the suffering queen. As it still keeps silence, and shows no sympathy with Hamlet, he again demands:

> Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
> That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
> The important acting of your dread command?

Hamlet's sensibility persuades him that he has carelessly wasted precious opportunities, and he has conceived of no other purpose for which the ghost should come, except to reproach him for delay, and yet its silence and apparent absorption in the agitation of the queen suggest that some other cause controls it. Hamlet waits patiently for a response before he urges an answer to his question, with the words:

> O say!

and the ghost, turning at last from its rapt contemplation of Gertrude, unwilling to confess that love

for her has brought it there, catches at his suggestion, and hesitatingly explains:

> Do not forget: this visitation
> Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.

Hamlet's purpose was not blunted:—at that moment it was stronger than ever before; and there could be no fear of his forgetting, for, at the instant, he was pursuing his purpose, and with good result. The ghost did not tell the truth: its visitation was not to Hamlet but to Gertrude; it came solely to protect her, and to moderate the expression of Hamlet's feeling against his mother; and this should be made to appear unequivocally.

On the elder Hamlet's first appearance to his son, he had plainly shown his still-enduring love for his guilty queen; he had carefully tried to turn the sword of Hamlet's vengeance from her. His love for her was stronger than death; even her unfaithfulness could not extinguish it. He desired to be revenged on Claudius for the "witchcraft" he had employed to wean Gertrude from her husband, not for the murder by which he had been ousted from the throne. The throne he valued was her heart: without Gertrude he could not rest in heaven, and separation from her was, in itself, a hell. This was plainly indicated on the ghost's first appearance, and this, his second coming, still more plainly manifested the dead king's love. To defend the queen he even threatens Hamlet.

The ghost, on entering, should instantly interpose between her son and Gertrude, as if to screen and pro-

tect her from the pain Hamlet was inflicting on her. Its *materialization* should seem to result entirely from an overpowering desire to moderate Hamlet's bitterness toward his mother, and it should seem to menace the prince because he made his mother suffer. The ghost believed, if the critics do not, that Hamlet was ready to do bitter business, and feared that it might be more bitter than it had desired; and Hamlet's after-pleadings with his mother were much more temperate, his blunted (?) purpose was whetted, not to increased virulity against her, but to a careful moderation, in compliance with his father's desire, conveyed by his loving looks and words.

I know that nothing of this is expressly stated by Shakespeare, and this is not the way in which actors now represent the ghost, but is not this interpretation the only just one we can draw from what is stated? The First Quarto says: *Enter the ghost in his night gowne*, and Hamlet, in the later versions sees his father "in his habit as he lived." This intentionally indicates that the ghost's errand is not the same as when he first appeared, armed, *cap-à-pie*. He appears now clad as he usually was in the days of his union with Gertrude, appears in a garb which suggests that he is hovering around her in her chamber, though unseen. His attitude toward his son inspires fear, not awe. Hamlet's hair "starts up and stands on end" with fear, because his father's aspect now is terrible; his anger at Hamlet's harsh strictures on his mother threatens him; he glares on Hamlet, until the queen is roused from her an-

guish and questions her son. The tenderness of the ghost should be expressed in his effort to make Hamlet comfort Gertrude:

> But, look, amazement on thy mother sits:
> O, step between her and her fighting soul:
> Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works:
> Speak to her, Hamlet.

and Hamlet's question:

> How is it with you, lady?

should seem an involuntary obedience to the strong impulsion of his father's command. The ghost should brood over Gertrude, as if it was impossible to part from her, and when, at last, it steals out at the portal, its gaze should be fixed on her in love, and not on Hamlet. This should be its *piteous action* that threatens to convert his stern effects. Hamlet says:

> His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones,
> Would make them capable. Do not look upon me;
> Lest with this piteous action you convert
> My stern effects: then what I have to do
> Will want true colour; tears perchance for blood.

What was the peculiar condition that was to make stones capable? It was the expression of the ghost's undiminished love for a wife whose affection had been perverted by a villain. The ghost's form, which expressed this, joined with the cause which had made shipwreck of his life, would melt a stone. What was the piteous action that threatened to convert Hamlet's stern effects? There is but one action that could convert them; all others would

confirm and strengthen them. Every action except the one the ghost showed must have stimulated Hamlet to a quicker, sharper desire for revenge. The *piteous action* was the manifestation in the elder Hamlet's *form* that his love for Gertrude was stronger than death and the grave, stronger even than dishonor: none of these could destroy it. Hamlet is so moved by the revelation of his father's all-forgiving love, that he can not look upon him, nor meet his loving, yearning, supplicating eyes; he knows that he will crucify Gertrude by his purposed acts, and, for the first time, he recognizes that he shall wound his father also; he sees that all that Gertrude suffers the ghost too feels.

The piteous action that expresses his father's adoration for the queen, and arrays him against his son, moves Hamlet to tears, and threatens for a moment to turn him aside from his stern determination. But only for a moment: on the vanishing of the ghost Hamlet again turns to his task, but, in obedience to his father's wish, he pleads with his mother and does not again revile her.

Consider the beauty this view of the ghost restores to the play. Think of the contrast between the elder and the younger Hamlet; the one longing for the love of the woman he knows to be unworthy, the other tearing from his heart the image of the maiden he only fears may become so. The pathos of the play is increased if we realize how much more Hamlet suffers in his efforts to avenge his father's wrongs, than does his father in enduring them. His father excuses Gertrude, asserting that she was sub-

dued by the witchcraft of Claudius's wits and by his treacherous gifts, and he always loves her, and hopes to be re-united to her. In the elder Hamlet personal feeling is the cause for all his actions, while in our prince personal feeling is thrust aside, and absolute right and eternal justice are alone considered. Hamlet's probity enriches his appreciation of his father, but there is compensation even in this. Hamlet were doubly orphaned should his unquestioning admiration for the dead king be destroyed.

When the ghost steals away out at the portal, after beseeching his son to comfort Gertrude, Hamlet again addresses himself to the effort to move his mother to repentance and a consequent renunciation of Claudius. He no longer uses violence of speech against either his mother or his uncle. He pleads with Gertrude begging her if she cannot separate herself at once from her paramour, to do so by degrees; and as she listens to him without attempting to defend herself or Claudius, Hamlet's old-time tenderness for his dear mother wakes in his heart, and, had he been less upright, would have moved him to expression of it. He convinces Gertrude that he is not mad, and induces her to promise not to let Claudius extort from her a revelation of her son's real state of mind. He shows her his feeling against the king, and even expresses his intention to countermine him, without eliciting a word of remonstrance from her. She makes no response when her son beseeches her:

> Repent what's past; avoid what is to come.

It would not be fitting that she should do so; but her promise—

> Be thou assured, if words be made of breath,
> And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
> What thou hast said to me—

convinces us that the opening wedge, that will ultimately separate her from her guilty love, has been inserted. She consents to conceal Hamlet's secret from Claudius, and we know the rest will follow.

Hamlet's seeming indifference to Polonius's death looks like insensibility, but is not, except in the sense that at this moment he is insensible to everything that will not help him to attain his end—his mother's repentance and his uncle's death. His immediate thought about it is that this murder will furnish to Claudius a legitimate excuse for sending him to England. When he has time to reflect he deeply regrets the killing, and sympathizes with Laertes's anger and his grief, recognizing its resemblance to his own. When he parts from his mother he drags the dead councilor with him, and Gertrude leaves her closet and goes toward the king's apartments.

One further word I wish to add before I leave the consideration of this scene. Except by the lines of the text, which indicate that Hamlet compels Gertrude to look upon two pictures, one of which has

> A station like the herald Mercury
> New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill—

Shakespeare does not explain what these pictures are, nor how they should be exhibited; and the cus-

tom of actors in the inspection of them differs. Some represent the pictures as hanging on the wall, —half-length portraits sometimes, and sometimes full-length; others produce two miniatures, one from the queen's neck, and one from Hamlet's; and others see the portraits only with their mind's eye. Is it fair to consider the German *Hamlet—Fratricide Punished*—which Cohn says was "in the Dresden stage-library in 1626"? In it Hamlet says:

> But see, there in that gallery hangs the counterfeit [conterfait] of your first husband, and there hangs the counterfeit of your present. What think you now? Which of them is the comeliest? Is not the first a majestic lord?*

Surely this shows us how the pictures were managed in *Fratricide Punished*, and thus brings us nearer to Shakespeare's time than any other authority. Would it not be most effective if both portraits—full-length—should hang within view of the audience, the picture of king Hamlet just outside Gertrude's closet, beyond the entrance through which the ghost appears? Should not this portrait represent the king in his ordinary costume, and not in the "armor he had on, when he the ambitious Norway combated?" And would it not be a justifiable stage effect to represent the ghost as the counterpart and exact imitation of this picture, suddenly becoming visible to Hamlet directly in front of his portrait; so that Hamlet should doubt, until the ghost moved quickly forward toward Gertrude, whether it was not merely a delusion of his

* Quoted from Furness's *Variorum Hamlet*, vol. 2, p. 133.

vision? This it seems to me, would be very powerful; but always, where I speak of the way, the means, by which Shakespeare should be represented, it is with diffidence. I always desire to be understood as expressing an opinion only, not asserting anything absolutely, and in many places I hope the generosity of the reader of these pages will insert, *I think*, *I believe*, or *It seems to me*.

XXII.

THE succeeding scene exhibits the king, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the queen, who has probably just come into their presence in a condition of great agitation. The king perceives it, and addresses her sharply;—who can tell what he then feared? He knew Polonius had not returned!

> There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves:
> You must translate: 'tis fit we understand them.
> Where is your son?

Gertrude dismisses the two courtiers, and then tells Claudius that Hamlet, in a sudden attack of frenzy, has killed Polonius; she says he is "mad as the sea and wind, when both contend which is the mightier:" and thus we see how thoroughly she keeps her promise of concealment, made a minute earlier. She is better than her word—or worse—for she lies to screen Hamlet from the consequences of his rash action. But she need feel no alarm. Claudius dares not attempt to punish this crime. He fears that Hamlet, if he be arraigned, will turn on him and accuse him of his brother's murder; he knows nothing of the ghost, and he supposes Hamlet's knowledge of his guilt (knowledge manifested by the mock-play) was obtained from some witness whom he can produce. He dares not bring Hamlet to trial; he must carry out

his first design and send him instantly to England, and he uses the death of Polonius as an excuse to Gertrude for her son's sudden departure. He sends Guildenstern and Rosencrantz to find Hamlet, and bring Polonius's body to the chapel, and then, telling the queen,—

> Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends;
> And let them know, both what we mean to do,
> And what's untimely done,—

he goes to seek his counselors.

Hamlet now comes in. That he is still in the same condition of mental excitement as when he left his mother's closet, appears from his momentary wonder at the voices of his two school-fellows, who call him. This wonder is caused by their familiarity; they call him "Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!" None but his father and his mother call him so—"*Hamlet*"—and for a moment he thinks he hears his father's voice, and looks about him again to discern his presence. 'Tis for a moment only, and when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, demanding where he has left the body of Polonius, he meets their questions with the same biting sarcasm that he had before employed toward them: he scarifies them with his caustic words, and then goes with them to the king. He has decided that the assumption of madness, which for thirty-six hours has been his amusement, must now be his protection. He words his answers to the king so that they tell the absolute truth, and yet deceive his hearers. The audience understand them, and Hamlet's condition of

excitement seems so to have infected them, that they almost join in the sneering laugh with which he directs the attendants to the body of Polonius with the seemingly heartless words: "He will stay till ye come."

When Claudius tells the prince that he must at once, for his own safety, start for England, Hamlet seems to express surprise; but he already has expected this, and reminded his mother of it a short time before, saying:

> There's letters seal'd: and my two school-fellows,
> Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,
> They bear the mandate.

We should wonder how Hamlet knew this project was on foot, for Claudius had only conceived the plan of sending him in charge of the two spies that same night after the play, did we not find authority for his knowledge in the old *Hystorie*, p. 306, "Hamblet understanding that he should be sent into England, presently doubted the occasion of his voyage, etc." Shakespeare found this statement and accepted it: he wrote to make a play, and his genius did not stop to explain everything that we latter-day gossips might make clear.

Hamlet's farewell to Claudius was intended for his mother: he knew Gertrude would question Claudius as to her son's parting words, and he purposely made them paradoxical that they might remain in Claudius's mind. He knew that the repetition of his words, "father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh;" would renew

in Gertrude's memory the recollection of the injunctions he had addressed to her, to separate from Claudius and adhere again to her husband with whom she was "one flesh." This last obscured message was his final effort to obey the ghost's command, before, very early in the morning, he started for England with his two school-fellows.

As they go toward the ship they cross a plain, and there meet Fortinbras and his army, who is here introduced so that when the final catastrophe arrives, and the crown diverts to him, we can account for his presence at the Danish court. Hamlet stops to speak with the captain of the forces, and, when he has parted from him, delays a little ere he again rejoins his companions, and expresses his intense disgust with his own apathy that still allows the king to live. He says:

> How all occasions do inform against me,
> And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
> Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and god-like reason
> To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,
> A thought which quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward, I do not know
> Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;'
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
> To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me:
> Witness this army of such mass and charge
> Led by a delicate and tender prince,

Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Hamlet's severe strictures on his own conduct are what we should expect from his super-sensitiveness. He is not really to blame for any delay; the moment he was convinced the ghost should be believed he began to act—really he began before this, when he went to Ophelia's chamber; and it is his own mis-directed *action*—the killing of Polonius—that is sending him now from Denmark. Hamlet has become a man of action; his days of thoughtful contemplation are past. From the moment the mock play convinces him that his father, and not the devil, had appeared to him, he is all action, and all his action is devoted to one end—the killing of the king.

Immediately after the play Hamlet turned on his school-fellows, and openly manifested his contempt

for Claudius: this was action. He was about to stab the king and restrained himself till he could kill both soul and body: paradox though it seem, this was action. He awakened his mother's conscience, and killed Polonius: this too was action, and action calculated to fulfill the ghost's command. When he is sent from Denmark, the very first night out he stealthily removes the papers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are bearing to England, examines them, and at once prepares others to replace them: this certainly is action. The next day in the sea-fight he is the first and only man who, in the grapple, boards the pirate ship: action again. He persuades the pirates to spare his life and to carry him back to Denmark: action. He at once writes to the king saying that next day he should desire to see him, and to Horatio desiring him to come to him "with as much speed as thou would'st fly death." At Ophelia's grave he proclaims his title to the crown he expects so soon to wear: *This is I, Hamlet the Dane.* He goes straightway to the castle to kill the king: he fences with Laertes at once—no postponement: and, before he succumbs to death, he kills Claudius, and prevents Horatio from draining the poisoned cup. Him he compels to live to tell the world of Hamlet's *actions.*

Hamlet's self-reproaches are like those with which we afflict ourselves when we stand beside the grave of one we love. Now matter how great our tender regard has been, at that hour we always accuse ourselves of much that we have done and left undone.

Hamlet knows his duty has not been accomplished, and the fear that he has neglected opportunities to obey his father's command outweighs the fact that he has acted, and is acting, with reasonable quickness. He sees Fortinbras ready to dispute the title to a tiny plot of ground, while he has hesitated to press his just claim to the whole realm of Denmark, and has besides as "excitements to his reason and his blood," a father slain, and a mother dishonored. He sees himself sent away from his native land, and the knowledge that this absence will paralyze his arm, at least for a time, spurs him to self-abuse because he had not better employed his time, when it was his. We ought to see the incentives to Hamlet's Seventh Soliloquy, and not accept his self-condemnation as a just judgment. He can not decide "whether it be bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event," that has so long withheld him. He does not remember how founded in reason his doubts have been. Now that he is at last convinced that the ghost spoke truth, he thinks that he has always believed him, and forgets that knowledge secure enough to justify action has been obtained only within the last twelve hours. A less rational and investigating mind than Hamlet's would instantly have been imposed on by the apparition, and would have acted first and investigated afterward. Hamlet was never afraid to kill the king, but he did fear to commit injustice: he thinks now that only insensibility to his father's wrongs could have made him suspect that vengeance could be in-

justice, and his last words before he embarks for England are:

> O, from this time forth,
> My thoughts be bloody, or be little worth!

Hamlet's departure from Denmark closes the second day of the Second Period. In it a great variety of changes has occurred. Claudius has been convinced that Hamlet is not mad, by the same testimony which convinces Ophelia that his mind is quite overthrown; the mock-play has proved the truthfulness of the ghost; Hamlet has turned upon his school-fellows and defied them; the king has confessed his guilt to the audience; Hamlet has killed Polonius; Gertrude's conscience has been awakened, and she has sided with Hamlet against her husband; and Hamlet has been sent out of the kingdom in charge of his two school-fellows.

XXIII.

THE next scenes require the lapse of many weeks —of full two months—to accomplish what they represent. It requires that time for the ship in which Hamlet sailed to reach England and return to Denmark. Remember how long a time was required for the ambassadors to go to Norway and return. It requires that time for a messenger to reach Laertes in France and come back again with him to Elsinore.

The first scene (which is now numbered Scene V. Act III.) shows us Ophelia, after she became deranged, forcing her way into Gertrude's presence. Her derangement was no gradual alienation, as Hamlet's was supposed to be, but a sudden loosening of the bonds of reason. While her condition was the consequence of her father's death, his death alone was not the cause of it. The death of a father, as Claudius reminds us early in the play, is "as common as any the most vulgar thing to sense;" and, happy circumstance, filial affection accepts it as a necessary blow. But Ophelia's father had been killed by Hamlet; this much she knew, though she was not informed of it at first, and was ignorant of it when she sent to France for Laertes. She then suspected Claudius. She knew only that her father was dead, and had been taken,

by the king's command, to the royal chapel, instead of to his own house, and thus she was shut away from the tender communings with her dead that affection covets. She saw in this a proof of an unnatural death, but no immediate explanation was given to her, or to the messenger whom she dispatched to fetch Laertes. After his departure she was told, but not by Gertrude, that Hamlet had killed her father. The story was a muddled one: she could not find out why Polonius was in the queen's closet behind the arras, nor what had induced Hamlet to draw his sword upon him. She was not consulted as to her father's obsequies, and he was hastily and shabbily interred. The poor child revolved the catastrophe of his death again and again, returning always to the one thought that Hamlet was her father's murderer. She knew this act of Hamlet's had made it forever impossible that she should become his wife. It was not her own feeling that decided thus. She loved him so blindly that if she could have believed Hamlet would welcome her, she would have fled to his side, and would have found some excuse, in his madness, again to justify her forgiveness of him. But this murder had accented, in the most positive manner, his previous repudiation of her. She could not but accuse herself as being, in a remote way, the cause of her father's death, and of Hamlet's loss of reason: her too quick obedience to her father's injunctions had, she thought, first alienated her lover's affection and then directed his sword against her father. These are the thoughts that precede and accomplish

Ophelia's loss of reason: her mind was dethroned, she was deranged, insane.

It has been said that Ophelia was Gertrude's favorite maid of honor, and that it was during her attendance on his mother that Hamlet had won her heart. This is gratuitous; there is absolutely nothing to indicate it; although the old *Hystorie*, p. 294, represents that the "beawtifull woman" who desired Hamblet, was "one that from her infancy loved and favored him." It has also been said that Gertrude's words at Ophelia's grave present a redeeming feature in her character. These words are hypocritical; they do not express true affection; they are uttered in the hearing of Laertes and the priests, for the purpose of disarming criticism. Gertrude shows no affection for Ophelia while living, no sympathy with her when insane, and no agitation when she brings to her brother the word that she is drowned. The only redeeming feature that the queen possessed was one she shared with roaring lions and with ravening wolves, with the most abject and worthless of her sex—affection for her offspring. The elder Hamlet's love for her is only another of the many examples of a worthy man loving a perverted nature, and excusing all its evil deeds. If Shakespeare had intended to endow Gertrude with any womanly virtue, he would surely have represented her as interested in, and caring for, the daughter of the man her son had killed. She should have brought her to the castle, and should have assuaged her own sorrow at Hamlet's exile, and Ophelia's grief at her double loss, by sweet

communings, in which the name they both so dearly loved would have been mentioned only to excuse his hasty and ill-resulting deed. But Shakespeare represents Gertrude and Claudius, after the lapse of two months, as so careless of Ophelia's well-being that her appearance at the palace gives them the first information of her loss of reason.

Horatio, Hamlet's dear and true friend, goes with her to the castle, when he sees she will not be restrained. By this circumstance Shakespeare shows us the depth and faithfulness of Horatio's love for Hamlet. He is a comparative stranger in Elsinore, but he seems to be the only friend who watches over Hamlet's "Rose of May." The prince had not told Horatio of his mother's adultery: (he was unwilling to speak of that while he hoped the ghost might be a liar) and he therefore had said nothing of his determination to renounce Ophelia. Horatio watches over her for his dear friend's sake, because he knows he loves her, but her unprotected condition would have interested his sympathy, did this claim upon it not exist.

The queen and Horatio and an attendant gentlemen appear, when the curtain rises, and the queen, as she enters, says:

I will not speak with her.

These words show us how little Gertrude cares for the sweet demented maiden; she is not willing even to see her, and try if affection and tenderness can dissipate the cloud that enfolds her. "I *will not* speak to her!" These words express the extreme

of selfishness, and it is an appeal to Gertrude's selfishness that at last procures admission for Ophelia. The gentleman who has come in with Horatio, probably the gentleman in waiting, more tender-hearted than the queen, says:

> She is importunate, indeed distract:
> Her mood will needs be pitied.
> *Queen.* What would she have?
> *Gent.* She speaks much of her father; says she hears
> There's tricks i' the world; and hems, and beats her heart;
> Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in doubt,
> That carry but half sense: her speech is nothing,
> Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
> The hearers to collection; they aim at it,
> And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts;
> Which, as her winks, and nods, and gestures yield them,
> Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
> Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.
> *Hor.* 'Twere good she were spoken with; for she may strew
> Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

The speech of the gentleman does not express his meaning very clearly: he dares not say exactly what he thinks, and he wraps his thoughts in suggestive words. He has heard Ophelia's speech and songs, and has seen her winks, and nods, and gestures, and he concludes from them what other minds, notably Tieck's, have done, and suspects that Hamlet had been guilty of a greater wrong than the murder of Polonius. Horatio sees this, and covertly rebukes him for his evil thoughts in the words "ill-breeding minds." The gentleman, with all his tenderness, had an ill-breeding mind.

We need not dwell upon Ophelia's words when

she is at last admitted to the queen. We perceive that Gertrude and Claudius have not known of her disorder, and from her speech at parting we get an idea why she has come to the castle—she wanted counsel, and she departs satisfied, thinking she has received it. Her memory has returned to the circumstances that unseated it, and she says, as though in reply to some remembered effort to console her when she first heard of her father's death:

> I hope all will be well. We must be patient: but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i' the cold ground. My brother shall know of it: and so I thank you for your good counsel.

And so she departs, and Horatio with her.

We feel that it is desecration to criticise Ophelia. She is so real a creation and her griefs are so heart-rending that we treat her as we would a loved and living friend, and turn away, burying all her self-revelations in our hearts, not commenting on them, or revealing them. We can feel about the poor maid much more than we can say.

As Ophelia came into Gertrude's presence, the queen's words—

> To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss:
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
> It spills itself in fearing to be spilt—

indicated that the remonstrances of Hamlet have been fruitful in arousing her guilty conscience. We do not see that she is repentant, but we know that she is disturbed, and that is the first step to repentance and renunciation.

When Gertrude and Claudius are left alone, the king makes a show of hypocritical regret over Ophelia's misfortune. I believe he was rejoiced at Polonius's death, not only because it gave him an excuse for Hamlet's removal, but because it silenced one who could have testified to the equivocal manner in which he had secured the throne. He is very anxious, however, to impress on Gertrude that all Ophelia's disorder sprung from her father's death —this throws the responsibility for it on her son— and he explicitly reminds the queen that Hamlet is the "most violent author of his own just remove." Claudius is afraid that when he shall in a few days receive the news of Hamlet's assassination, Gertrude may remember that he proposed sending her son away, before the murder had made it seem so necessary.

XXIV.

As the king is telling Gertrude that Laertes has in secret returned from France, and that, surprised at his father's obscure funeral, he is trying to find out, before his return becomes known, what was the cause of Polonius's death, a great noise is heard—the noise of a rabble. Claudius calls on his switzers to guard the door, but a gentleman rushes in crying upon the king to save himself, and hastily explaining that Laertes has overborne the officers who guard the palace, and is now, at the head of the mob, seeking for the king. Laertes has so inflamed the rabble, he says, that they cry out, "Laertes shall be king." The mob was not ungrateful. It remembered that Polonius's efforts had placed Claudius on the throne of Denmark; a violent death had been his reward; and their unreasoning justice would have snatched the crown away from Claudius, and given it to Polonius's son.

While the gentleman is speaking, Laertes enters, the Danes following. Laertes begs them to remain without, and, at his request, they withdraw, leaving their leader alone with Gertrude and the king. These two have seen that Laertes can control the mob; they know that at a word from him the inflamed populace will be upon them, and now, first, do we behold in the usurper the display of kingly

qualities. As Laertes turns from the Danes and flies at Claudius, crying:

> O thou vile king,
> Give me my father!

Gertrude throws herself between them, trying to calm him, but Claudius does not blench or move; he stands and fronts the danger, and his first words show absolute control of his nerves and of his senses:

> What is the cause, Laertes,

he says,

> That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?

This he speaks calmly, and in such a measured tone, showing no fear, that Laertes for a moment recoils, and Claudius then addresses Gertrude, who had tried to hold Laertes back, saying:

> Let him go, Gertrude; do not fear our person:
> There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
> That treason can but peep to what it would,
> Acts little of his will. Tell me, Laertes,
> Why thou art thus incensed. Let him go, Gertrude.
> Speak, man.

This is magnificent. At this moment Claudius is "every inch a king." The kingly plural never more fitly represented the multiplied importance of its royal user. Claudius when he spoke thus was the worthy representative of every king that ever was. He did not quail or palliate Laertes's crime—rebellion he plainly called it, and treason—and instead of submitting to be questioned he demands a reply of Laertes, and reiterates it in the words:

"Speak, man." Laertes is amazed, his violent anger seems unnecessary, and he more calmly asks:

> Where is my father?
> Dead.

responds the king, vouchsafing no explanation or appeasing word, but Gertrude, fearing this reply will make Laertes rage again, explains:

> But not by him.

and the king rebukes her agitation and indicates his own fearlessness by saying:

> Let him demand his fill.

This is an imposing picture of dignity and regal self-command. Laertes is impressed by it, his wonted reverence for his anointed king controls him, and he feels his anger slip away from him. He, for an instant, thinks of this as witchcraft, then, returning to his just cause for indignation, he cries:

> How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with:
> To hell allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!
> Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
> I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
> That both the worlds I give to negligence,
> Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged
> Most throughly for my father.

By a few measured words Claudius controls Laertes's agitation until he speaks, as Claudius says, "like a good child and a true gentleman;" but before any explanations have been given him a

noise is again heard without. It is the Danes crying:

Let her come in,—

meaning Ophelia, who re-enters as Laertes asks:

How now! what noise is that?

I think Ophelia's loss of reason should be more plainly indicated by her representatives, than I have ever seen it. Down-hanging hair and an apron full of flowers are not enough to manifest to a brother that his sister is deranged, and yet Laertes perceives it the moment his eyes rest upon Ophelia. In this scene, and the preceding one, Ophelia should wear a black dress. Two months have passed since her father's death. Hamlet was clad in deepest black although his father had not been dead so long, and Laertes is often represented as coming back from France in sable robes. If Ophelia were robed in black, the incongruity between her mourning dress and her festival flowers and bearing would at once suggest a loss of reason, and in the "business" of her part in this scene and the former one, her recurring references to her father should seem to be suggested to her shattered mind, when her eye is arrested by her unaccustomed black gown.

Laertes truly loved his sister, and he does not express more than he feels when he sees her "blasted with ecstacy." He approaches to embrace her, and she continuously evades him, as though he were a stranger, but the tenor of her songs reveals that Laertes's presence has struck some chord of remembrance. The first one strives to tell him of

their father's death, and then a spark of recollection kindles the thought, "Bonny sweet Robin is all my joy." Bonny sweet Robin, whom Laertes with his parting words had cautioned her against.

I do not see why so much attention is devoted to the deciphering of Ophelia's "document in madness." Thoughts and remembrance are fitted with their appropriate flowers—pansies and rosemary: these she gives to Laertes because he is young, and she confounds him with her lover, but it is idle to expect a fitness through all the distribution. She had not gathered the flowers with any idea of pointing a moral, and only as she gave them did any thought of their name and meaning occur to her. We love Ophelia in her derangement even more than before: she is so patient and submissive, so pathetic in the expression of her sorrow; she so plainly shows her love and her innocence, that we are thankful insanity has made her in some degree insensible to her cause for woe; that memory has ceased to paint her griefs in all their first distinctness.

She sings her little songs, and gives her flowers, and passes from our sight forever with the gentle benediction:

> God ha' mercy on his soul!
> And of all christian souls, I pray God, God be wi' ye.

And, when her watery death has washed from her recollection every stain of sorrow, we heartily rejoice because Death the Deliverer has carried her away from her earthly captivity.

XXV.

BUT we must inquire why Shakespeare, when he shows us Ophelia in her madness, presents her exactly as he does. We should be glad if the recollection of her incoherent words might be a little different.

This representation of Ophelia is a justification of Hamlet. Without it, lookers-on at the theater might not agree with him, and might feel that his decision to renounce a loving, meek, obedient maid had proved, as no other of his actions could, the possession of a mind diseased. But Hamlet, early in the play, has had many interviews with Ophelia at which we were not present; he has given many private hours to her; he has recollections that we know not of, which have helped him in his judgment. Shakespeare wishes to bring his auditors with full consent of their reason to agree with Hamlet, therefore he shows them Ophelia, when, the sweet restraints of reason being removed, her songs disclose the burden of her thoughts. Like the

> maid called Barbara
> She was in love, and he she loved proved mad
> And did forsake her : she had a song of "willow ";
> An old thing 'twas but it express'd her fortune,
> And she died singing it.

In the scene with Laertes his presence controls Ophelia's recollections, and confines them almost

absolutely to their father, but in the preceding scene the presence of Claudius and Gertrude, who were so closely connected with Hamlet, awakens in her unsettled brain a longing for his love and his caresses, and this she expresses in her songs.

Critics who have not seen the need for Ophelia's self-disclosure have wondered why Shakespeare should put such loose songs upon her lips. They have justified them by saying that she had heard them in her childhood from her nurse, and that, when reason and recollection were destroyed, her earliest impressions ruled her mind, and she now, with no recognition of their impropriety, sang the songs that had lain voiceless in her memory so many years. This is probably true, but Shakespeare undoubtedly meant, when he showed us Ophelia "divided from herself and her fair judgment," and allowed her to sing such songs, that we should see the natural bent and disposition of her senses, in order that we might justify Hamlet in his decision. He introduced Ophelia's madness, as he did Lady Macbeth's somnambulism, whose will in sleep could not control her thoughts, or the expression of them. Ophelia had heard other songs in her youth, songs from the *Pious Chanson* maybe, but she did not give them entertainment in her mind.

If we be shown two maids, both crazed by the same combination of circumstances, one of whom sings spiritual songs and turns her thoughts toward Heaven, and the other of whom expresses her grief as Ophelia did, shall we not inevitably decide

that they differ in disposition, and that the latter is subject to some insubordination of her senses which may in time lead them to mutiny against her virtue? Shakespeare thought so, and he had faith to believe that with this revelation our judgment would confirm Hamlet's, and free him from too much censure for his rejection of the maiden. We must not forget that Shakespeare *chose* these songs, as calculated to reveal Ophelia's disposition. He could have selected others, had he wished to do so.

It is so ungracious a task to speak of Ophelia in any but words of unqualified admiration, that I feel forced to defend myself for setting down about her what I believe Shakespeare meant to convey; and the prejudices of Ophelia-lovers are so strong, that unless I explain exactly how much I mean to say, they will conceive that more is meant than I express. I believe that Shakespeare meant to portray, in Ophelia, a maiden who was pure in thought and act, but whose disposition, inclination, natural tendency was sensuous. She was the sensuous Northern maiden, as Juliet was the sensuous Southern type, and she was absolutely as continent and chaste as Juliet—but not more so; and I have no doubt that she was also as free and unrestrained in the expression of her love to Hamlet as Juliet was to Romeo. Juliet and Ophelia were alike in natural disposition, but Romeo and Hamlet were unlike. While Romeo was moved to instant action the moment an impulse stirred him, Hamlet was self-controlled, and considered their results before he indulged, or even expressed, his desires. *Therefore*

he stifled his love for Ophelia, and it was he, not she, who prescribed the lines within which their intercourse was carried on.

Every word which Shakespeare employs for the portrayal of Ophelia's character strengthens this view of it. The subject is so delicate that only light touches can be used in her delineation, but these strokes all lead to the completion of a picture of a maiden who was innocent because she had not been tempted, but who had no backbone of principle or precept to keep her so;—a maiden whose own sensuous nature was the traitor that might deliver the treasures in its charge to an invading libertine, had such an one desired to make conquest of them. It is clear to me that Hamlet believed this, and that Shakespeare meant that we too should recognize it. Every introduction of Ophelia deepens the lines of this picture, though almost as imperceptibly as the sun brings out a photograph.

The first time we see her we are shown that father and brother know her disposition, and strongly fear, that, if tempted, she will indulge it. On her next appearance she tells her father of Hamlet's visit to her chamber early in the morning. This visit was an unpardonable liberty. His recklessness did not arise from madness, but from the freedom of his association with Ophelia along "the primrose path of dalliance." His doubts were torturing him, and he desired to resolve them, and knew that she would excuse a visit that a sane man would not have dared to pay to a lady-love whose maidenly reserve had commanded his respect. Ophelia excused it

instantly, but Polonius could not conceive that anything but madness could justify the prince in such an act of presumption.

The inscription in Hamlet's letter to Ophelia is another effort to delineate the maiden. Are not the words:

> In her excellent white bosom, these, &c.,

meant to suggest that Hamlet allowed himself at least a freedom of speech with Ophelia? To a sensitive mind the words do not express exactly the same sentiment as we find in "pure bosom," "gentle bosom," which Shakespeare elsewhere employs; and to no maiden but Ophelia does Shakespeare allow a lover to speak or write in such a tone; —of her person rather than her qualities. The phrase is allied to Richard's free expression of his desire for Lady Anne:

> So I might live an hour in your sweet bosom.

As soon as Polonius read the lines,—"In her excellent white bosom, these, &c." Gertrude interrupted him, asking:

> Came this from Hamlet to her?

She can hardly believe that her son would write in this way to any maiden, and Polonius, seeing that she doubts whether the prince had written *thus*, but does not doubt that he has written, replies:

> Stay awhile, I will be faithful.

That is, 'Do not judge so fast; I will read nothing that he did not write.'

The fact that Ophelia had this missive is another of Shakespeare's touches. Her father had forbid-

den her to receive Hamlet's tokens, and she had told him that she "did repel his letters and denied his access," and then, rather than go in person to the king, she had produced this letter, although it was a proof of her disobedience. Understand, I am not blaming her for this, any more than I should blame a red rose for not being white. I only insist that red is red, and that Shakespeare meant us to see it red.

Hamlet's conversations with Polonius about his daughter are strong helps to our understanding of Ophelia's character, and so is his conversation with her, in the lobby, and at the mock-play. They show that Hamlet, who knew her better than we, believed that her sensuousness might become sensuality.

Ophelia's consenting to encounter Hamlet, by seeming accident, the very day after he had treated her with such great rudeness, and her planning to offer to return his gifts to him, are touches by which she is self-revealed; and her songs, when insanity has still further loosened the bonds of self-restraint, expose her natural disposition to us. Even the words used by Horatio and the gentleman in waiting on Gertrude add to our conception of Ophelia's character. We understand what the gentleman means though he does not express it plainly, and Horatio, who, while he knows her innocence, yet knows to what "thoughts" her hearers may "botch her words up," advises:

> 'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
> Dangerous conjecture in ill-breeding minds.

The words with which Gertrude leaves the scene, when Ophelia is going to the lobby to meet Hamlet, are open to the construction that she too entertained a doubt as to the purity of their relations. It was natural that her depraved mind should attribute evil to others, and she did not believe that disappointed love had any share in producing Hamlet's transformation; but her words are these:

> And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
> That your good beauties be the happy cause
> Of Hamlet's wildness: so shall I hope your virtues
> Will bring him to his wonted way again,
> To both your honours.

After all this, which looks like censure, shall I be excused if I say I think Hamlet was wrong in rejecting the maiden? if I say that, had he married her, he would have bounded her horizon, and she would have been as absolutely faithful to him as were Imogen or Desdemona to their husbands? I believe that Hamlet's fidelity to his ideal, which separated him from Ophelia, entailed an unnecessary sacrifice,—a sacrifice to which both were innocent victims. Ophelia's love had root, not in her fancy alone but in the very fibre of her heart; her reason was destroyed by her efforts to conceive of and support life without Hamlet. Such a love could blossom only once, and would have bloomed for Hamlet only.

This conception of Ophelia does not, in my opinion, dethrone or degrade her: it defines her character with strong lines and enhances the beauty aud pathos of the play.

XXVI.

LAERTES did not follow his sister when she left the royal presence, but he withdrew with Claudius, who, in some other apartment, gave him his version of Polonius's murder, telling him that Hamlet, seized with sudden madness, had killed the chamberlain supposing him to be the king. While Claudius is making this explanation we see Horatio in another room of the castle. Sailors bring him a letter from Hamlet, saying that "it comes from the ambassador that was bound for England." This letter tells Horatio that Hamlet is returned to Elsinore, and is now waiting, in some secluded spot, desirous that his friend shall come to him; the sailors are to guide him. But they have other letters, one for the king and one for Gertrude; both are sent to Claudius. We do not know that Gertrude's letter ever reaches her, but we see, in Hamlet's sending it, a proof that he has lost no time in again reminding his mother of his parting admonitions.

In the next scene we see Claudius when these letters are delivered to him. He has had time to tell Laertes how and when Hamlet had killed Polonius, and we now hear him excuse himself for not bringing the prince to punishment. He says he loves Gertrude so dearly that he could not bear to

wound her by proceeding against her son. This, his first reason, we know to be untrue, for he is in daily expectation of the news of Hamlet's death, for which he only is responsible. The other reason as he explains it, is that the young prince is so beloved by his late father's subjects that they would excuse any fault in him, and consider it a virtue; this, though true in fact, is untrue in its application. But Claudius, finding that Laertes is clamorous for revenge, is just about to confide to him that he has ordered Hamlet's death, when he is interrupted by the messenger who brings the letters which have been sent in by the sailors. Taking them both, his own and the queen's, he tells Laertes:

You shall hear them.

His own letter, which he first opens and reads, seems so to have surprised him that he does not read the other. This letter to Claudius differs widely from the grave and thoughtful epistle Hamlet sent to his friend; it is not the respectful salutation of a son to a father, or a subject to a king. The matter and the manner of it could both be attributed to madness, and we see that Hamlet means still to continue, in the presence of his enemies, a behavior which was forced upon him by them. The letter says that "to-morrow" Hamlet will seek to see the king, and Claudius instantly conceives a plan by which Laertes, while he pursues his own revenge, shall free him forever from the dread which Hamlet must inspire so long as he remains upon the earth. This he thinks he can accomplish with-

out exposing himself to suspicion, which must have touched him had the prince been killed by England: he says:

> I will work him
> To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
> Under the which he shall not choose but fall ;
> And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,
> But even his mother shall uncharge the practice
> And call it accident.

Claudius has measured Laertes, and he knows his honor is an empty bubble, and that, like his father, he can be employed for a cowardly and knavish undertaking. He explains the *exploit* which he has devised, and Laertes, to prove that he is ripe for the villainy he is embracing, and fully understands its aim, suggests that the unbated foil, with which he is to stab his former friend, shall be anointed with a deadly poison, which he has by him. The mere ownership of this ointment should convince us that Laertes was not an honorable man. Claudius assents to the double treachery proposed, and then, revolving in his own mind the possibility that Laertes, with all his skill, may not be the better fencer, he sees that a failure on his confederate's part may subject them both to suspicion, and allow time for Hamlet to make his charge against him. In order to make all sure, he suggests that a poisoned cup shall be prepared, of which the prince shall be induced to drink, and he charges his ally to be violent in his attacks on Hamlet, so that thirst shall surely be induced in him. Just as this compact is concluded Gertrude hastily enters, and is

greeted by the man who is prepared to lacerate her heart by murdering her only child, with the hypocritical endearment:

How now, sweet queen?

Gertrude has come to tell them that the fair demented maid, who parted from them so short a time before, is drowned. She tells the story, but she does not manifest emotion, and probably does not feel it. Her perverted mind inserts in the melancholy tale an allusion to the gross name given to Ophelia's flowers by "liberal shepherds," and her whole narration is more florid than sorrow would have made it.

Her words do not suggest that Ophelia intended to end her own life, and there is nothing in the story to make us believe it. The priests inclined to think so, and, in consequence, refused to bury her except with "maimèd rites," but her only fault was that she made no effort to save herself when the "envious sliver broke": her clouded mind did not perceive that death was imminent. In her last moments, as through all the play, Shakespeare paints Ophelia as the very opposite, in mental quality, to Hamlet. Her life is cut short, as her love and her hope of happiness had been, by her own act, but by an act of whose probable result she was absolutely unconscious. Indeed the whole play is a drama of cross-purposes; no one act results as its originator intended.

When Laertes hastens to the spot where his dead sister lies, Claudius, instead of expressing any

sympathy with this new cause for grief or any sorrow for the maiden, says only:

> Let's follow, Gertrude:
> How much I had to do to calm his rage!
> Now fear I this will give it start again;
> Therefore let's follow.

Ophelia's death is the last of the occurrences of this day with which we are made acquainted: it is the first day of the Third Period. In it we are shown first Ophelia's madness; then Laertes's return to Denmark; the receipt by Horatio of his letter from Hamlet; the delivery of Hamlet's letter to the king; the perfecting of the plot by which Laertes is to kill the prince; and last, Ophelia's death.

XXVII.

ON the following day—the last day of the play—we are shown, in Act V. Scene I., the churchyard where the grave-digger is preparing Ophelia's grave. He sings as he digs, and moralizes with his companion. Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance, and slowly approaching the open grave they watch the delver as he throws out the bones of the forgotten dead.

Horatio has been with his friend for many hours, probably all the time since the sailors conducted him to him. Communion with his loving friendship has been protection to Hamlet from his own heavy thoughts. Horatio has not plied him with questions, and Hamlet has been glad to rest some hours, forgetting the past and oblivious of the future. His friend's silence was a balm to his wounded sensibilities. He has told Horatio only how his return had been accomplished through the sea-fight, and has waited until the morrow to tell him of the fate that had overtaken Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: this he has not yet done, although the morrow has come, the morrow of which Hamlet said in his letter to Claudius, "To-morrow I shall beg leave to see your kingly eyes." This is the day in which he means to end his uncle's life, and at last fulfill his

obligation to his father's spirit. He has in his possession the commission that Claudius gave the two spies, with which to satisfy the populace that their ruler's death was merited, and he knows that the exhibition to his mother of his uncle's treachery toward him, and the repetition of the ghost's story of his previous villainy, will forever separate her heart from her seducer. He did not, instantly on his arrival, hasten to kill the king: he needed time to rest his body and compose his thoughts, and to tell Horatio what his plan was, so that he could count upon his intelligent support when the moment for action had arrived.

It is not unnatural that the two friends should walk in the churchyard. It is quite possible that Hamlet's first act in the morning was to come to church, to give thanks for his safe return, and to pray for a blessing on the means which he should use to perform what seemed to him a religious duty. He does walk there in a very serious frame of mind, although his volubility exposes the excitement which possesses him as he contemplates the death he must so soon inflict. He comments on the skulls the grave-digger unearths, attributing them, in turn, to Cain, who first was guilty of a brother's murder; to a politician, who is now o'erreached; to a courtier; and to a lawyer. All have come to this one rendezvous, and he reflects that a king's skull will soon be added to the gruesome congregation.

Horatio indulges Hamlet's soliloquizing, answering only "Ay, my lord.", "No, my lord.", until

finally their steps are arrested at the open pit. Hamlet questions the grave-digger about his business, and receives from him some mortuary statistics, but in all his questionings his mind reverts to the tenant he is so soon to furnish for another grave. He asks Horatio:

Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth?

Alexander was a greater king than is his uncle, and to this complexion shall Claudius, too, soon come.

Neither Hamlet nor Horatio knew for whose use the narrow bed they stood by was preparing. Horatio had gone to Hamlet a few hours after he had parted from Ophelia, and no message had brought him word of the tragedy that so soon had overtaken her. There was therefore no reason why he should seek to draw his friend away from the spot, and, while they still linger, the priests in procession; the body of Ophelia covered on her bier; Laertes and the mourners following; and the king and queen and their train enter and stand beside the open grave.

As they approach, Hamlet and Horatio retire behind the neighboring tombs. Hamlet wishes not yet to be seen by the king or queen. He is not inflamed to anger by the sight of his uncle, the time for that is past; he is now a righteous avenger, and the calmness and strength of an assured mission possess him in the presence of the man he is compelled to sacrifice. His judgment tells him that he should not kill him there, in the church-yard, where his death would increase the sorrow of the friends

who are bringing their dear one to the grave, and he observes the interment with perfect composure.

He does not remember that Horatio had probably seen Laertes when he before came home from France—Hamlet had not met Horatio until after Laertes's departure—and he now points him out, with the words:

> That is Laertes,
> A very noble youth.

Thus Hamlet's ingenuous mind judges the man who has already perfected the plot to kill him. He observes the obsequies, until Laertes's words:

> A ministering angel shall my sister be,
> When thou liest howling.

reveal that it is his lost love whom they are here interring; then he throws himself into Horatio's arms, crying out under the sharp anguish of the revelation:

> What, the fair Ophelia!

All his smothered love for her overwhelms him. Death has lifted her above the reach of every earthly taint; "all that remains of her now is pure womanly," and Hamlet's love for her resumes its sway. When Laertes leaps into his sister's grave, Hamlet advances and claims his right to mourn Ophelia. In all the obliviousness of his grief the words in which he announces himself show that he already sees the crown of Denmark in his possession. His uncle has no right to it, and

will soon relinquish it, and Hamlet, realizing this, asserts:

> This is I,
> Hamlet the Dane.

The Dane—the King.

It is impossible fitly to comment on Hamlet's passion at Ophelia's grave; it is as measureless as was his anguish; but during the long four months since we saw Hamlet first he has been subject to heavy discipline and has had many and bitter opportunities for the exercise of self-restraint. Now he clenches his hands and locks his teeth in a vain effort to control himself, but his heart-broken wail:

> I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum.

must have cleft the sky and reached Ophelia in the upper world. The music of these words, reaching her heart, would far overpower the chorus of the heavenly choirs.

Hamlet finally recovers his self-command, and, afraid again to lose it, hastens away, Horatio following. While his anguish had possessed him the king had made an effort to restrain Laertes from violence toward him, crying:

> O, he is mad, Laertes!

and the queen had appealed to Hamlet in Laertes's behalf:

> For love of God, forbear him.

In the modern editions, the queen is also represented as saying to Laertes, and the on-lookers:

This is mere madness:
And thus awhile the fit will work on him;
Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping.

I think these lines are wrongly attributed to Gertrude; she has never believed in Hamlet's madness, and has never subscribed to the belief in it, except in what she told the king after Polonius's killing—and we know why she did this. In the First Quarto these lines, now given to the queen, are spoken by the king,—

Forbeare *Leartes*, now is hee mad, as is the ſea,
Anone as milde and gentle as a Doue:
Therfore a while giue his wilde humour ſcope,—

and in the Folio it is the king who says:

This is meere Madnesse:
And thus awhile the fit will worke on him:
Anon as patient as the female Dove,
When that her golden Cuplet are disclos'd;
His silence will sit drooping.

Only the Second Quarto gives this sentence to the queen, but in the First Quarto she does speak some words that are, however, omitted from the Second Quarto and the Folio:

Alas, it is his madnes makes him thus,
And not his heart, *Leartes*.

Apart from the consideration that Gertrude does not believe in Hamlet's insanity, (and this she manifests even in this scene, by her question:

O my son, what theme?

to which she expects an answer, and receives it; and by her exhortation to Hamlet:

> For love of God, forbear him,—

an exhortation it would be more than useless to address to a maniac in an outburst of frenzy,) Claudius is much more likely to advance the statement than the queen. He has already excused Polonius's murder by the statement to the Danes that Hamlet is mad, and this he has to adhere to. He fears the priests and courtiers will interfere if Laertes seriously attempts to kill the prince, and will rescue him alive; in which case Hamlet will tell all he knows about his uncle's crime, to free himself from condemnation for Polonius's death—a death meant for the king. This Claudius fears, and his first effort is to restrain Laertes by the cry:

> O, he is mad, Laertes.

He would be glad to convince the world of this, for then Hamlet's revelation, if it could not be suppressed, he could attribute to the delusion of insanity. I think these lines—*This is mere madness, etc.*, —should be restored to the king, to whom, in the Folio and the Second Quarto, they are given. In addition to the testimony of the text, we must consider that nowhere else does the queen seem to apologize for her son, directly or indirectly: she is always his defender, treating him with love and respectful consideration, espousing his cause against the world. Gertrude would not have consented to be present at the fencing-match if she had believed

her son insane: she would have known Laertes was exposed to be murdered by Hamlet.

As Hamlet, attended by Horatio, leaves the circle around the grave, Claudius continues, speaking to Laertes, and not to all the courtiers:

> Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech:
> We'll put the matter to the present push.

Turning to the queen he says:

> Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.

Then turning back to Laertes he continues:

> This grave shall have a living monument:
> An hour of quiet shortly shall we see;
> Til then, in patience our proceeding be.

Ophelia's funeral has lately been represented as taking place at night. Burial at night is said to be one of the "maimed rites" to which she was subjected, but there is no reason to believe this, and the text of the play indicates the contrary. As we have seen, Claudius, at her grave, says to Laertes:

> Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech:
> We'll put the matter to the present push.

The "last night's speech" was the one in which the plan to kill Hamlet had been elaborated, and the "matter" was the fencing-match, which, as Claudius wished, should furnish a living monument for Ophelia's grave. In fulfillment of his design to "put the matter to the *present* push," he sent Osric to Hamlet with the challenge as soon as the funeral

train had returned to the palace. In the First Quarto he says to Laertes at the grave:

> Wee'le no longer trifle,
> This very day ſhall *Hamlet* drinke his laſt,
> For prefently we meane to fend to him,
> Therfore *Leartes* be in readynes.

And Hamlet says to Osric:

> 'tis the breathing time of day with me.

All the text indicates that there was no long interval between Ophelia's burial and Osric's meeting with Hamlet in the hall of the castle whither the prince had gone to kill the king, and where the subsequent fencing-match and Claudius's death took place. The coming of Fortinbras and the English ambassadors immediately after the fencing-match, while Hamlet is still alive, strongly supports the belief that the fencing, and consequently the burial which preceded it, took place in the day-time.

As Hamlet left Ophelia's grave he uttered some words of which I am not assured the critics see the relevancy, and yet, to my mind, they are very significant. His suffering and agitation were extreme, and his anger had leaped out against Laertes, who had grappled with him in the grave and choked him. Hamlet quickly exhibited great self-control, but it required great effort. At one moment he was about to renew the controversy with Laertes, and approached him saying:

> Hear you, sir;
> What is the reason that you use me thus?
> I loved you ever.

But he immediately recollected himself, and the

strong motive he had for self-repression closed his lips; he meant to kill the king on the first opportunity, and he would not run the risk of being killed under the pretense that he was dangerous. He arrested himself in his speech to Laertes by the thought that shortly he would have fulfilled the ghost's command, and would then be able to explain all his misjudged actions, and he expressed this to the audience by the words:

> but it is no matter;
> Let Hercules himself do what he may,
> The cat will mew and dog will have his day.

It was Hercules's turn,—the king's turn, then to put him in an equivocal position, but in an hour it would be his;—the dog would have his day.

He designed to express this a little later, when the audience might otherwise think his fencing with Laertes was procrastination.

> I am constant to my purposes; they follow the king's pleasure: if his fitness speaks, mine is ready; now or whensoever, provided I be as able as now.

Hamlet knew the audience would see the double meaning in this speech, and understand that he was constant to his purpose to kill the king, and it was fit he should express this, on both occasions, even though they were already well assured of it.

XXVIII.

ON the opening of the next scene we see that Hamlet, with Horatio, has gone directly from Ophelia's grave to the castle, there to meet the king as he had the day before announced he meant to do. On the way he has told Horatio what he had before withheld from him—the story of his mother's lapse from virtue, and his consequent decision to renounce Ophelia. He has told him that Polonius mistook his subsequent conduct for love-madness, and hid to gain the testimony to prove it, and that, mistaking him for the king, he had unintentionally killed him. Horatio knew how his friend had been sent away in company with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (he believed, however, that Hamlet went as an ambassador to demand England's neglected tribute), and to this knowledge Hamlet alludes when we see him and Horatio, in a hall in the castle:

> So much for this, sir:

(*this* being the story he he has been telling him *en route*)

> now shall you see the other;
> You do remember all the circumstance?

—all the circumstances that preceded his embarkation. Then he briefly tells Horatio all that he had

been subjected to since his departure; he exposes the treachery of the king, and justifies himself for having sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death, and finally, speaking of his uncle, asks his friend:

> Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon—
>
> . . . . .
>
> is't not perfect conscience,
> To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd,
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?

Horatio, who is as moderate as Hamlet is impassioned—and in this difference in their dispositions was the foundation of their friendship—does not reply directly to this question, but says:

> It must be shortly known to him from England
> What is the issue of the business there.

and Hamlet rejoins:

> It will be short: the interim is mine;
> And a man's life's no more than to say 'One.'
> But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
> That to Laertes I forgot myself;
> For, by the image of my cause, I see
> The portraiture of his: I'll court his favours:
> But, sure, the bravery of his grief did put me
> Into a towering passion.

As these words are upon his lips Osric enters, bearing the challenge from the king in Laertes's name. This challenge gives Hamlet an opportunity he had not hoped for to court Laertes's favors; it shows him that Laertes overlooks his agency in Polonius's death, and his violence at Ophelia's

grave, and is willing to try a "brother's wager" with him. Hamlet has faith that an opportunity to kill the king will soon arise—if not, he can make one—but his nearest duty is to apologize to his friend. He had proclaimed his love for Ophelia in the presence of the priests and of the court, and he does not now mean to retreat from his confession. I think his words to Laertes—

> I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,
> And hurt my brother—

and,

> I . . . will this brother's wager frankly play—

are not purely figurative, but that they express his fraternal feeling toward the brother of his love.

When Osric has delivered his message, Hamlet accepts the challenge, and says he is willing to play the match at once. He is impatient of any long delay, for he has more important business in hand. He does not play because the king requests it, but because a refusal would throw back Laertes's proffered reconciliation, and still farther affront him.

The king and queen, with all the court, come to the hall to see the fencing. The queen has not yet embraced her son since his return, but throughout the match she shows her tender love in care for his comfort. The king, whose villainy has devised the coming murder, says:

> Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me.

Hamlet's response, as he grasps Laertes's hand, has been condemned as falsehood. If it were so, then this is not the first time Hamlet has departed from

the truth—his reply to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—

> I cannot . . . make you a wholesome answer: my wit's diseased

was equally untrue with this; but we accepted that answer as justifiable irony, of which the audience saw the true interpretation. Hamlet speaks with the same intention now, but his audience is enlarged by the addition of the king: he also sees the irony of Hamlet's speech, but he dares not take exception to it. Hamlet's first words mean exactly what they say, and are a sufficient apology to Laertes:

> Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong;
> But pardon't as you are a gentleman.

The next lines are aimed at the king, to show him that Hamlet knows what excuses he must have used to Laertes. He does not know that Claudius has told the youth that the stab which killed Polonius was meant for the king; he thinks his uncle has withheld this, fearing to be questioned by Laertes as to why Hamlet sought to take his ruler's life, and that he has untruly told him that Hamlet's madness was the only inciter to the deed. Therefore Hamlet continues:

> This presence knows,
> And you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd
> With sore distraction.

In this strain he ambiguously expresses the absence of any intention to kill Polonius, concluding:

> Sir, in this audience,
> Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil
> Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,

That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,
And hurt my brother.

"In this audience" has a double application; it means in the presence of the king, who knows the truth, and in the presence of the court, who witness my apology.

Admitting, as we must, that irony is the weapon with which Hamlet has before defended himself, I do not see why we should expect his words now to conform exactly to the truth. There is a bitter justice in his using for his excuse the madness Claudius had attributed to him for his condemnation.

Laertes partially accepts Hamlet's apology, saying:

I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive, in this case. should stir me most
To my revenge: but in my terms of honour
I stand aloof; and will no reconcilement,
Till by some elder masters, of known honour,
I have a voice and precedent of peace,
To keep my name ungored. But till that time,
I do receive your offer'd love like love,
And will not wrong it.

This is Laertes's absolute lie in response to Hamlet's ironical statement.

We see Laertes only for so short a time, early in the play, that we form no judgment of him, except that he is a loving brother. When he pushes into the king's presence demanding vengeance for his father's murder, we say, "This is a noble son." We are deluded by his loud words, and assume that filial love and reverence animate him to cry:

I'll be revenged
Most throughly for my father.

But before he parts from the king he makes most plain that it is not sorrow for his father's death, but vanity wounded at his obscure obsequies, for which he demands revenge. Formal ostentation is his idol, as it had been his father's. His nature has been so perverted by his education that he receives the king's suggestion to murder Hamlet without surprise or repulsion, and crowns the device with his own more devilish contrivance. The king knew Laertes's nature, and he knew how easily he could work him to this exploit. Laertes's honor was a name and not a thing. His character was the result of Polonius's teachings, and Shakespeare, showing us how easily it was corrupted, helps us to feel sure that Ophelia had no foundation of principle to keep her firm under temptation.

There is no need to follow the fencing-match to its issue, nor to review the machinery by which the guilty actors in the drama are brought to breathe their life out there upon the stage. All are guilty, though not in the same degree. Claudius has killed his brother and aimed at Hamlet's life; Hamlet himself has killed Polonius and the king, and procured the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; Laertes has killed Hamlet; and Gertrude, by her too easy lapse from virtue, has been the incentive and original of all these crimes. All die together. Innocent Ophelia has preceded them to the grave.

This is not the result Hamlet had pictured to himself when he resolved to obey the ghost's com-

mand, and yet it is at last fulfilled to the most remote particular. Claudius is killed by Hamlet, and in an "act that has no relish of salvation in it." Thus his brother's foul and most unnatural murder is avenged. The other injunction of the ghost:

> Let not the royal bed of Denmark
> Be a couch for luxury and damnèd incest.

is also obeyed, in letter and in spirit. The queen's dying words—

> No, no, the drink, the drink,—O my dear Hamlet,—
> The drink, the drink! I am poison'd—

which she spoke in repudiation of Claudius's statement—

> She swounds to see them bleed—

show that she knows the king's treachery and would be glad to have him suffer for it. In dying Gertrude is eternally divorced from Claudius, and by her own will. The ghost's revenge is complete.

If it did not appear that Hamlet had been the instrument to accomplish this, all his sufferings and Ophelia's would seem without result; but we recognize that Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's chamber—his first act as the direct result of the ghost's revelation —has been the cause of all that follows. His obedience and his efforts to obey do not result as he intended, but for this we should have been prepared. After the catastrophe we remember that Shakespeare has given us many hints that the end would not be that which Hamlet proposed in the beginning. The player king says:

Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth, but poor validity:
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree;
But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.

. . . . . .

What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.

. . . . . .

Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown.
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.

Claudius says to Laertes:

That we would do,
We should do when we would; for this 'would' changes
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents:

Hamlet says to Horatio:

Let us know,
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall.

And:

There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will.

This constant obtrusion, in so many forms, of the thought, "Man proposes but God disposes," should have made us suspect that Hamlet would not execute the ghost's command in the way in which he thought to accomplish it. In truth, the *Tragedy of Hamlet* is a dramatization of defeat. With the exception of Hamlet, none of the characters in any way accomplish what they set out to do.

The death of Hamlet is his crowning victory. How should he submit to live accompanied by the

ghosts of Claudius, his mother, Polonius, Ophelia, his sometime friend Laertes, and his school-fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? These are the companions who would have peopled Hamlet's hours of solitude. In the presence of his God, who would judge the heart, and not alone the actions, he might hope to be freed from them forever.

Hamlet's last words are uttered to his tried and true friend. They command Horatio to make clear to the world what Hamlet had planned to do and had done, and what were the causes for his actions. He says:

> Horatio, I am dead;
> Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied.

For a moment it seems as if Horatio's love will not bear the test imposed on it. To live without Hamlet is so much harder than to die for or with him. He seizes the goblet from which his friend had drunk his death, exclaiming:

> Never believe it:
> I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
> Here's yet some liquor left,

but Hamlet, making a last supreme effort, wrenches it from him, and begs him, by the love that has so firmly united them, to suffer to live a little longer.

> As thou'st a man,
> Give me the cup: let go; by heaven I'll have it.
> O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story.

Horatio's unselfish affection accepts this duty, and he sums up the story of the play in a few words when he says to Fortinbras, and the English ambassadors:

> And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
> How these things came about: so shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on the inventors' heads; all this can I
> Truly deliver.

This speech contains, in the order in which they occurred, the epitome of every incident in the play. Who can doubt that the words, "accidental judgements," refer to Hamlet's judgment of Ophelia, which resulted from the ghost's revelation of Gertrude's impurity? If they do not relate to this, to what do they allude? to what other episode early in the play can they refer?

The "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts," are fratricide and adultery; the "casual slaughter" is the murder of Polonius; "deaths put on by cunning and forced cause" means the killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by England; and the closing lines "and, in this upshot, purposes mistook fall'n on the inventors' heads," refer to Claudius's and Laertes's death by the means which they had prepared to remove Hamlet. *Accidental judgements* refers to something other than any of these occurrences. Does it not point directly to Hamlet's answer to the question, "*And shall I couple?*"

HE HYSTORIE OF HAMBLET.

THE

HYSTORIE

OF HAMBLET.

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THE ARGUMENT.

IT is not at this present, neither yet a small time since, that enuy raigning in the worlde; hath in such sort blinded men, that without respect of consanguinitie, friendship, or fauour whatsoeuer, they forget themselues so much; as that they spared not to defile their hands with the blood of those men, who by all law and right they ought chiefly to defend and cherish. For what other impression was it, that entered into Romulus heart, when under pretence of I know not what lawe, he defiled his hands with the blood of his owne brother, but the abhominable vice of desire to raigne? which if in all the accurrences, prosperities, and circumstances thereof, it were well wayed and considered, I know not any man that had not rather liue at his ease, and priuately without charge, then being feared and honored of all men; to beare all the charge and burden vpon his shoulders; to serue and please the fantasies of the common people; to liue continually in feare, & to see himself exposed to a thousand occasions of danger; and most commonly assailed and spoiled, when hee thinkes verily to hold Fortune as slaue to his fantasies & will: & yet buyes such and so great misery, for the vaine & fraile pleasures of this world, with the losse of his owne soule: making so large a measure of his conscience, that it is not once mooued at any murther, treason, deceit, nor wickedness whatsoeuer he committed, so the way may be opened and made plaine vnto him, whereby hee may attaine to

that miserable filicitie, to command and gouerne a multitude of men (as I said of Romulus) who by a most abhominable action, prepared himselfe a way to heauen (but not by vertue.)

The ambitious and seditious Orator of Rome, supposed the degrees and steps to heaven, & the wayes to vertue, to consist in the treasons, rauishments, & massacres committed by him, that first layd the foundations of that citty. And not to leaue the hystories of Rome; what, I pray you incited Ancius Martinus, to massacre Tarquin the Elder, but the desire of raigning, as a king: who before had bin the onely man to moue and solicite the saide Tarquinius, to bereaue the righte heires and inheriters thereof? What caused Tarquinius the Proud, traiterously to imbrue his hands in the blood of Servius Tullius, his father in law, but onely that fumish and unbridled desire, to be commander ouer the cittie of Rome? which practice neuer ceased nor discontinued, in the said principal cittie of the empire, as long as it was gouerned by the greatest & wisest personages, chosen and elected by the people: for therein haue beene seen infinite numbers of seditions, troubles, pledges, ransommings, confiscations and massacres, onely proceeding from this ground and principle: which entereth into mens hearts, & maketh them couet and desirous to be heads and rulers of a whole common wealth. And after the people were depriued of that libertie of Election, and that the Empire became subiect to the pleasure & fantasie of one man, cominanding al the rest, I pray you peruse their bookes, and read diligently their Hystories; and do but looke into the meanes vsed by the most part of their kings and Emperours, to attaine to such power and authoritie: and you shall see how poysons, massacres, and secret murthers, were the meanes to push them forwards, that durst not openly attempt it, or else could not compasse to

make open warres. And for that the Hystory (which I pretend to shew vnto you) is chiefly grounded vpon treason, committed by one brother against the other; I will not erre far out of the matter: thereby desiring to shew you, that it is and hath been a thing long since practised and put in vse by men, to spill the blood of their neerest kinsmen and friends, to attaine to the honour of being great and in authoritie, and that there hath bin some, that being impatient of staying till their iust time of succession, haue hastened the death of their owne parents; as Absolon would haue done to the holy king Dauid his father: and as wee read of Domitian, that poysoned his brother Titus, the most curtious and liberall Prince that euer swayed the empire of Rome. And God knowes we haue many the like examples in this our time, where the sonne conspired against the father: for that Sultan Zelin, Emperour of Turkes, was so honest a man, that fearing Baiazeth his father, would die of his naturall death, and that thereby he should haue stayd too long for the Empire, bereaued him of his life: and Sultan Soliman his successor, although he attempted not any thing against his father, yet being mooued with a certaine feare to bee deposed from his Emperie, & bearing a hatred to Mustapha his son (incited therunto by Rustain Bassa whom the Iewes enemies to the yong prince, had by gifts procured therunto) caused him to be strangled with a bowe stringe, without hearing him (that neuer had offended his father) once speake to iustifie his innocencie. But let vs leave the Turkes like barbarians as they are, whose throne is ordinarily established by the effusion of the blood of those that are neerest of kindred and consanguinitie to the Empire, & consider what Tragedies haue bin plaid to the like effect, in the memorie of our Ancestors, and with what charitie and love the neerest kindreds and friendes

among them haue bin intertained; one of the other, if you had not the Hystories extant before you, if the memorie were not in a manner fresh, & known almost to euery man, I would make a long discourse thereof: but things being so cleare and euident, the truth so much discouered, & the people almost as it were glutted with such treasons, I will omit them & follow my matter, to shew you; that if the iniquitie of a brother, caused his brother to loose his life, yet that vengeance was not long delayed: to the end that traitors may know, although the punishment of their trespasses committed, be stayed for awhile, yet that they may assure themselues, that without all doubt, they shal neuer escape the puisant and revenging hand of God: who being slow to anger, yet in the ende doth not faile to shew some signes and euident tokens of his fearefull iudgement, vpon such as forgetting their duties, shed innocent blood, and betray their Rulers, whom they ought chiefly to honour, serue, and reuerence.

THE PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH in the beginning of this Hystorie, I had determined not to haue troubled with any other matter, than a Hystorie of our owne time, hauing sufficient tragicall matter to satisfie the minds of men: but because I cannot wel discourse thereof, without touching many personages, whom I would not willingly displease; and partly because the Argument that I haue in hand, seemed vnto me a thing worthy to bee offered to our French nobilitie for the great & gallant accurrences therein set downe: I haue somewhat strayed from my course, as touching the Tragedies of this our age: and, starting out of France and ouer Neitherlanders countries, I haue ventured to visit the Hystories of Denmarke, that it may serue for an example of vertue and contentment to our Nation (whom I specially seeke to please), and for whose satisfaction, I haue not left any flower whatsoeuer vntasted, from whence I haue not drawne the most perfect and delicate hony, thereby to bind them to my diligence herein: not caring for the ingratitude of the time present, that leaueth (and as it were reiecteth) without recompence, such as serue the Common-wealth, and by their trauell and diligence honour their countrey, and illustrate the Realme of France; so that often times the fault proceedeth rather from them, then from the great personages that haue other affaires which withdraw them from things that seeme of small consequence. Withall, esteeming

my selfe more than satisfied in this contentment and freedome which I now enioy, being loued of the Nobilitie, for whom I trauell without grudging; fauoured of men of learning & knowledge, for admiring & reuerencing them according to their worthinesse, and honoured of the common people, of whom although I craue not their iudgement, as not esteeming them of abilitie, to eternize the name of a worthy man, yet I account my selfe sufficiently happy to haue attained to this felicitie, that fewe or no men refuse, or disdaine to reade my workes, many admiring and wondering thereat: as there are some, that prouoked by enuie, blame and condemne it. To whom I confesse my selfe much bound and beholding, for by that their meanes, I am the more vigelant, and so by my trauell much more beloued and honored then euer I was: which to mee is the greatest pleasure that I can inioy, and the most abundant treasures in my coffers, wherewith I am more satisfied and contented, then (if without comparison) I enioyed the greatest treasures in all Asia. Now returning to our matter, let vs beginne to declare the Hystorie.

The Hystorie of Hamblet

Prince of Denmarke.

CHAPTER I.

How Horuendile and Fengon were made Gouenours of the Prouince of Ditmarse, and how Horuendile marryed Geruth, the daughter to Roderick, chief K. of Denmark: by whom he had Hamblet: and how after his marriage his brother Fengon slewe him trayterously, and marryed his brothers wife, and what followed.

The Danes in times past barbarous and vnciuill.

YOU must vnderstand, that long time before the Kingdome of Denmark receiued the faith of Iesus Christ, and imbraced the doctrin of the Christians, that the common people in those dayes were barbarous & vncivill, and their Princes cruell, without faith or loyaltie: seeking nothing but murther, and deposing (or at the least) offending each other; either in honours, goods, or lives: not caring to ransome such as they tooke prisoners, but rather sacrificing them to the cruell vengeance, naturally imprinted in their hearts; in such sort, that if ther were sometimes a good prince, or king among them, who beeing adorned with the most perfect gifts of nature, would adict himselfe to vertue, and vse courtesie, although the

The cruelltie of the Danes.

people held him in admiration (as vertue is admirable to the most wicked) yet the envie of his neighbors was so great, that they never ceased untill that vertuous man, were dispatched out of the world. King Rodericke, as then raigning in Denmarke, after hee had appeased the troubles in the countrey, and driuen the Sweathlanders and Slaueans from thence, he diuided the kingdom into diuers Prouinces, placing Governours therein: who after (as the like happened in France) bare the names of Dukes, Marqueses, & Earls, giuing the government of Jutie (at this present called Ditmarsse) lying vpon the countrey of Cimbrians, in the straight or narrow part of land, that sheweth like a point or cape of ground vpon the sea, which neithward bordereth vpon the countrey of Norway. Two valiant & warlike Lords, Horuendile and Fengon, sonnes to Geruendile, who likewise had beene gouernour of that Prouince. Now the greatest honor that men of noble birth could at that time win and obtaine, was in exercising the art of Piracie vpon the seas; assayling their neighbours, & the countries bordering upon them: and how much the more they vsed to rob, pill, and spoyle other Prouinces, and Ilands farre adjacent, so much the more their honours and reputation increased and augmented: wherein Horuendile obtained the highest place in his time, beeing the most renouned pirate that in those dayes scoured the seas, & hauens of the North parts: whose great fame, so mooued the heart of Collere, king of Norway, that he was much grieued to heare that Horvendile surmounting him in feates of armes, thereby obscuring the glory by him alreadie obtained vpon the seas: (honor more than couetousnesse of richer, (in those dayes) being the reason that prouoked those barbarian princes, to ouerthrow and vanquish one the other; not caring to be slaine by the handes of a victorious

Rodericke king of Denmarke.

Jutie at this time, called then Ditmarsse.

Horuendile a king and a Pirate.

Collere king of Norway.

person. This valiant and hardy king, hauing challenged Horuendile to fight with him body to body, the combate was by him accepted, with conditions, that hee which should be vanquished, should loose all the riches he had in his ship, and that the vanquisher should cause the body of the vanquished (that should bee slaine in the combate) to be honourably buried, death being the prise and reward of him that should loose the battaile: and to conclude, Collere, king of Norway (although a valiant, hardy, and couragious prince) was in the end vanquished and slaine by Horuendile: who presently caused a Tombe to be erected, and therein (with all honorable obseques fit for a prince) buried the body of king Collere, according to their auncient manner, and superstitions in those dayes, and the conditions of the combate, bereauing the Kings shippes of all their riches, and hauing slaine the kings sister, a very braue and valiant warriour, and ouerrunne all the coast of Norway, and the Northren Ilands, returned home againe layden with much treasure, sending the most part thereof to his soueraigne, king Rodericke, thereby to procure his good liking, and so to be accounted one of the greatest fauourites about his maiestie.

Horuendile slew Collere.

The King allured by those presents, and esteeming himselfe happy to haue so valiant a subiect, sought by a great fauour and coutesie, to make him become bounden vnto him perpetually, giuing him Geruth his daughter to his wife, of whom he knew Horvendile to bee already much inamored: and the more to honor him, determined himselfe in person to conduct her into Jutie, where the marriage was celebrated according to the ancient manner: and to be briefe, of this marriage proceeded Hamblet, of whom I intend to speake, and for his cause haue chosen to renew this present Hystorie.

Hamlet sonne to Horuendile.

Fengon brother to this Prince Horuendile, who

[not] [1] onely fretting and despighting in his heart at the great honor and reputation wonne by his brother in warlike affaires, but solicited and pro- uoked (by a foolish jelousie) to see him honored with royall aliance, and fearing thereby to bee de- posed from his part of the gouernment: or rather desiring to be onely Gouernor: thereby to obscure the memorie of the victories and conquests of his brother Horuendile; determined (whatsoeuer happened) to kill him. Which hee effected in such sort, that no man once so much as suspected him, euery man esteeming that from such and so firme a knot of alliance and consanguinitie, there could proceed no other issue than the full effects of vertue and courtesie: but (as I sayd before) the desire of bearing soueraigne, rule and authoritie, respecteth neither blood nor amitie, nor caring for vertue as being wholly without respect of lawes, or maiestie diuine: for it is not possible that hee which inuadeth the countrey & taketh away the riches of an other man without cause or reason, should know, or feare God. Was not this a craftie and subtile Counsellor? but he might haue thought that the mother, knowing her husbands case, would not cast her sonne into the danger of death. But Fengon, hauing secretly assembled certain men, & perceiuing himself strong enough to execute his interprise, Horuendile, his brother being at a banquet with his friends, sodainely set vpon him, where he slewe him as traiterously, as cunningly he purged himselfe of so detestable a murther to his subiects: for that before he had any violent or bloody handes, or once committed parricide vpon his brother, hee had incestuously abused his wife, whose honour hee ought as well to haue sought and procured, as traiterously he pursued and effected his destruction; and it is most

Fengon, his conspiracie against his brother.

Fengon killeth his brother.

[1] [*Not*, not in the text.]

certaine, that the man that abandoneth himselfe to any notorious and wicked action, whereby he becommeth a great sinner, hee careth not to commit much more haynous and abhominable offences, & couered his boldnesse and wicked practise with so great subtiltie and policie, and vnder a vaile of meere simplicitie, that beeing fauoured for the honest loue that hee bare to his sister in lawe, for whose sake hee affirmed, he had in that sort murthered his brother, that his sinne found excuse among the common people, & of the Nobilitie was esteemed for iustice: for that Geruth being as courteous a princesse, as any then liuing in the North parts, and one that had neuer once so much as offended any of her subiects, either commons or Courtyers; this adulterer and infamous murtherer, slaundered his dead brother, that hee would have slaine his wife, and that hee by chance finding him vpon the point ready to doe it, in defence of the Lady had slaine him, bearing off the blows which as then hee strooke at the innocent Princesse, without any other cause of malice whatsoeuer: wherein hee wanted no false witnesses to approoue his act, which deposed in like sort, as the wicked calumniator himselfe protested, being the same persons that had born him company, & were participants of his treason, so that instead of pursuing him as a paricide & an incestuous person, al the Courtyers admired and flattered him in his good fortune: making more account of false witnesses and detestable wicked reporters, and more honouring the calumniators, then they esteemed of those that seeking to call the matter in question, and admiring the vertues of the murthered Prince, would haue punished the massacrers and bereauers of his life. Which was the cause that Fengon, boldned and incouraged by such impunitie, durst venture to couple himselfe in marriage with her, whom hee vsed as his Concubine during good Horuendiles life, in that sort spot-

Slanderers more honoured in court then vertuous persons.

The incestuous marriage of Fengon with his brothers wife.

ting his name with a double vice, and charging his conscience with abhominable guilt, and two fold impietie, as incestuous adulterie, and parricide murther: and that the vnfortunate and wicked woman, that had receaued the honour to bee the wife of one of the valiantest and wisest Princes in the North, imbased her selfe in such vile sort, as to falsifie her faith vnto him, and which is worse, to marrie him, that had bin the tyranous murtherer of her lawfull husband: which made diuers men thinke, that she had beene the causer of the murther, thereby to liue in her adultery without controle. But where shall a man finde a more wicked & bold woman, then a great personage, once hauing loosed the bands of honor and honestie: This Princesse who at the first, for her rare vertues and courtesies was honored of al men, and beloued of her husband, as soone as she once gaue eare to the tyrant Fengon, forgot both the ranke she helde among the greatest dames, and the dutie of an honest wife on her behalfe. But I will not stand to gaze and meruaile at women: for that there are many which seeke to blase and set them foorth: in which their writings, they spare not to blame them all for the faults of some one, or fewe women. But I say, that either Nature ought to haue bereaued man of that opinion to accompany with women, or els to endow them with such spirits, as that they may easily support the crosses they endure, without complaining so often and so strangely, seeing it is their owne beastlinesse that ouerthrowes them. For if it be so, that a woman is so imperfect a creature, as they make her to be: and that they know this beast, to bee so hard to bee tamed as they affirme: why then are they so foolish to preserue them, and so dull and brutish as to trust their deceitfull and wanton imbraceings. But let us leaue her in this extreamitie of laciuiousnesse, and proceed to shewe you, in what

If a man be deceiued by a woman, it is his owne beastlinesse.

sort the yong Prince Hamlet behaued himselfe, to escape the tyranny of his vncle.

CHAPTER II.

How Hamblet counterfeited the mad man, to escape the tyrannie of his vncle, and how he was tempted by a woman (through his vncles procurement) who thereby thought to vndermine the Prince, and by that meanes to finde out whether he counterfeited madnesse or not: and how Hamblet would by no meanes bee brought to consent vnto her; and what followed.

GERVTH hauing (as I sayd before) so much forgotten herself, the Prince Hamblet perceiuing him selfe to bee in danger of his life, as beeing abandoned of his owne mother, and forsaken of all men; and assuring himselfe that Fengon would not detract the time, to send him the same way his father Horuendile was gone: to beguile the tyrant in his subtilties (that esteemed him to bee of such a minde, that if he once attained to mans estate, he wold not long delay y^e^ time to reuenge the death of his father) counterfeiting the mad man with such craft & subtill practises, that he made shewe as if hee had vtterly lost his wittes: and vnder that vayle hee couered his pretence, and defended his life from the treasons and practises of the tyrant his vncle. And all though hee had beene at the schoole of the Romane Prince, who because hee counterfeited himselfe to bee a foole, was called Brutus: yet hee imitated his fashions, and his wisedom. For euery day beeing in the Queenes Palace (who as then was more carefull to please her whoremaster, then ready to reuenge the cruell death of her husband, or to restore her sonne to his inheritance) hee rent and

tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in the durt and mire, his face all filthy and blacke, running through the streets like a man distraught, not speaking one worde, but such as seemed to proceede from madnesse, and meere frenzie, all his actions and iestures beeing no other, then the right countenances of a man wholly depriued of all reason and vnderstanding: in such sort, that as then hee seemed fitte for nothing, but to make sport to the Pages and ruffling Courtiers, that attended in the court of his vncle and father in law. But the yong Prince noted them well enough, minding one day to bee reuenged in such manner, that the memorie thereof should remaine perpetually to the world.

Beholde, I pray you, a great point of a wise, and braue spirite in a yong Prince, by so great a shewe of imperfection in his person for aduancement, and his owne imbasing and despising, to worke the meanes and to prepare the way for himselfe to bee one of the happiest Kings in his age. In like sort, neuer any man was reputed by any of his actions more wise and prudent then Brutus, dissembling a great alteration in his minde, for that the occasion of such his deuise of foolishnesse, proceeded onely of a good and mature counsell and deliberation; not onely to preserue his goods, and shunne the rage of the proude Tyrant, but also to open a large way to procure the banishment and vtter ruine of wicked Tarquinius, and to infranchise the people (which were before oppressed) from the yoake of a great and miserable seruitude. And so not onely Brutus, but this man and worthy prince, to whom wee may also adde King David, that counterfeited the madde man among the petie kings of Palestina, to preserue his life from the subtill practises of those kings. I shew this example, vnto such as beeing offended with any great personage, haue not sufficient meanes to preuaile in their intents, or reuenge the iniurie

Brutus esteemed wise, for counterfeiting the foole. Read Titus Liuius and Halicarnassus.

Dauid counterfeited the mad man, before king Aches.

by them receiued: but when I speake of reuenging any iniury receiued, vpon a great personage, or
Rom. 8. 21. superior: it must be vnderstood by such an one as is not our soueraigne, againste whome wee maie by no meanes resiste, nor once practise anie Treason nor conspiracie against his life: and hee that will followe this course, must speake and doe all things whatsoeuer that are pleasing and acceptable to him whom hee meaneth to deceiue, practise his actions, and esteeme him aboue all men, cleane contrarye to his owne intent and meaning; for that is rightly to playe and counterfeite the foole, when a man is constrained to dissemble, and kisse his hand, whome in hearte hee could wishe an hundred foote depth vnder the earth, so hee mighte neuer see him more: if it were not a thing wholly to bee disliked in a christian, who by no meanes ought to haue a bitter gall, or desires infected with reuenge. Hamblet in this sorte counterfeiting the madde man, many times did diuers actions of great and deepe consideration, and often made such and so fitte answeres, that a wise man would haue iudged from what spirite so fine an inuention might proceede; for that standing by the fire and sharpning sticks like poynards and prickes, one in smiling manner asked him wherefore he made those little staues so sharpe at the points, I
A subtill answere of Prince Hamlet. prepare (saith he) piersing dartes, and sharpe arrowes, to reuenge my fathers death, fooles as I said before, esteemed those his words as nothing; but men of quicke spirits, and such as hadde a deeper reache began to suspect somewhat, esteeming that vnder that kinde of folly there lay hidden a great and rare subtilty, such as one day might bee preiudiciall to their prince, saying that vnder colour of such rudenes he shadowed a crafty pollicy, and by his devised simplicitye, he concealed a sharp and pregnant spirit, for which cause they counselled the king to try & know if it were possible, how to dis-

couer y^e^ intent & meaning of y^e^ yong prince, & they could find no better, nor more fit inuention to intrap him, then to set some faire, and beawtifull woman in a secret place, that with flattering speeches and all the craftiest meanes she could vse, should purposely seek to allure his mind to haue his pleasure of her: for the nature of all young men (specially such as are brought vp wantonlie) is so transported with the desires of the flesh, and entreth so greedily into the pleasures therof, that it is almost impossible to couer the foul affection neither yet to dissemble or hyde the same by art or industry, much lesse to shunne it. What cunning or subtilty so euer they vse to cloak theire pretence, seeing occasion offered, and that in secret, specially in the most inticing sinne that rayneth in man, they cannot chuse (being constrayned by voluptuousnesse), but fall to naturall effect and working. To this end certaine courtiers were appointed to leade Hamblet into a solitary place within the woods, whether they brought the woman, inciting him to take their pleasures together, and to imbrace one another, but y^e^ subtill practise vsed in these our daies, not to try if men of great account bee extract out of their wits, but rather to depriue them of strength, vertue, and wisedome, by meanes of such deuilish practitioners, and intefernall spirits, their domestical seruants, and ministers of corruption: and surely the poore prince at this assault had bin in great danger, if a gentleman (that in Horuendiles time had bin nourished with him) had not showne himselfe more affectioned to the bringing vp he had receiued with Hamblet, then desirous to please the Tirant, who by all meanes sought to intangle the sonne in the same nets wherein the father had ended his dayes. This gentleman bare the courtiers (appointed as aforesaide of this treason) company, more desiring to giue the prince instructions what he should do, then to

Nature corrupted in man.

Subtilties vsed to discouer Hamblets madnes.

Corrupters of yong gentlemen in princes courts and great houses.

intrap him making full account that the least showe of perfect sence and wisedome that Hamblet should make, would be sufficient to cause him to loose his life: and therfore by certain signes he gaue Hamblet intelligence, in what danger hee was like to fall if by any meanes hee seemed to obaye, or once like the wanton toyes, & vicious prouocations of the gentle woman, sent thither by his Uncle: which much abashed the prince, as then wholy beeing in affection to the Lady, but by her he was likewise informed of the treason, as being one that from her infancy loued and fauoured him, and would haue been exceeding sorrowfull for his misfortune, and much more to leaue his companie without inioying the pleasure of his body, whome she loued more than her selfe. The Prince in this sort having both deceiued the courtiers, and the Ladyes expectation, that affirmed and swoore that hee neuer once offered to haue his pleasure of the woman, although in subtilty hee affirmed the contrary: euery man there vpon assured themselues that without all doubt hee was distraught of his sences, that his braynes were as then wholly void of force, and incapable of reasonable apprehension, so that as then Fengons practise took no effect: but for al that he left not off: still seeking by al meanes to finde out Hamblets subtilty: as in the next chapter you shall perceiue.

CHAPTER III.

How Fengon, vncle to Hamblet, a second time to intrap him in his pollitick madnes: caused one of his counsellors to be secretly hidden in the Queenes chamber: behind the arras, to heare what speeches past betweene Hamblet and the Queen and how Hamblet killed him, and escaped that danger and what followed.

AMONG the friends of Fengon, there was one that

aboue al the rest, doubted of Hamblets practises, in counterfeiting the madman, who for that cause said, that it was impossible that so craftie a gallant as Hamblet that counterfeited the foole, should be discouered with so common & vnskilfull practises, which might easily bee percieued, and that to finde out his politique pretence it were necessary to inuent some subtill and crafty meanes, more attractiue, whereby the gallant might not haue the leysure to vse his accustomed dissimulation, which to effect he said he knewe a fit waie and a most conuenient meane to effect the kings desire, and thereby to intrap Hamblet in his subtilties, and cause him of his owne accord to fall into the net prepared for him, and thereby euidently shewe his secret meaning: his deuise was thus, that King Fengon should make as though he were to goe some long voyage, concerning affayres of great importance and that in the meane time Hamblet should be shut vp alone in a chamber with his mother, wherein some other should secretly be hidden behind the hangings, vnknowne either to him or his mother, there to stand and heere their speeches, and the complots by them to bee taken, concerning the accomplishments of the dissembling fooles pretence, assuring the king that if there were any point of wisedome and perfect sence in the gallants spirit that without all doubte he would easily discouer it to his mother as being deuoid of all feare that she would vtter or make knowne his secret intent, beeing the woman that had borne him in her bodie, and nourished him so carefully, and withall offered himselfe to be the man, that should stand to harken, and beare witnesse of Hamblets speeches with his mother, that hee might not be esteemed a counsellor in such a case, wherein he refused to be the executioner, for the behoofe and seruice of his prince. This inuention pleased the king exceeding well, esteeming it as the onelie and soueraigne remedie to heale the prince

Another subtilty vsed to deceiue Hamblet.

of his lunacie, and to that ende making a long voyage issued out of his pallace, and road to hunt in the forrest, meane time the counsellor entred secretly into the Queenes chamber, and there hid himselfe behind the arras, not long before the Queene and Hamblet came thither, who being craftie and pollitique, as soone as hee was within the chamber doubting some treason, and fearing if he should speake seuerely and wisely to his mother touching his secret practises he should be vnderstood, and by that meanes intercepted, vsed his ordinary manner of dissimulation, and began to come like a cocke beating with his armes, (in such manner as cockes vse to strike with their wings), vpon the hangings of the chamber, whereby feeling something stirring vnder them, he cried a rat a rat, and presently drawing his sworde thrust it into the hangings, which done, pulled the counsellour (halfe dead) out by the heeles, made an end of killing him, and beeing slaine, cut his bodie in peeces, which he caused to be boyled and then cast it into an open vaulte or priuie, that so it mighte serue for foode to the hogges, by which meanes hauing discouered the ambushe, and giuen the inuenter thereof his iust rewarde, hee came againe to his mother, who in the meane time wepte and tormented her selfe, to see all her hopes frustrate, for that what fault soeuer she had committed, yet was shee sore grieued to see her onely child made a meere mockery, euery man reproaching her with his folly, one point whereof she had as then seene before her eyes, which was no small pricke to her conscience, esteeming that the Gods sent her that punishment for ioyning incestuously in marriage with the tyrrannous murtherer of her husband, who like wise ceased not to inuent all the means he could, to bring his nephew to his ende, accusing his owne naturall indiscretion, as beeing the ordinary guide of those that so much desire the pleasures of

Hamblets subtilty.

A cruel reuenge taken by Hamblet vpon him that would haue betraid him.

Queene Geruthes repentance.

the bodie, who shutting vp the waie to all reason respect not what maie ensue of their lightnes, and greate inconstancy, and how a pleasure of small moment is sufficient to giue them cause of repentance, during their liues, and make them curse the daye and time that euer any such apprehensions, entred into theire mindes, or that they closed theire eies to reiect the honestie requisite in Ladies of her qualitie, and to despise the holy institution of those dames that had gone before her both in nobilitie and vertue, calling to mind the great prayses and commendations giuen by the Danes to Rinde daughter to King Rothere, the chastest Lady in her time, and withall so shamefast that she would neuer consent to marriage with any prince or knight whatsoeuer, surpassing in vertue all the ladyes of her time, as shee herselfe surmounted them in beawtie, good behauiour, and comelines, and while in this sort she sate tormenting herselfe, Hamlet entred into the chamber, who hauing once againe searched euery corner of the same, distrusting his mother as well as the rest, and perceiuing himselfe to bee alone, began in sober and discreet manner to speak vnto her saying,

Rinde a princes of an admirable chastitie.

What treason is this, O most infamous woman! of all that euer prostrated themselues to the will of an abhominable whore-monger who vnder the vail of a dissembling creature couereth the most wicked and detestable crime that man could euer imagine, or was committed. How may I be assured to trust you, that like a vile wanton adulteresse, altogether impudent & giuen ouer to her pleasure, runnes spreading forth her armes ioyfully to imbrace the trayterous villanous tyrant, that murthered my father, and most incestuously receiuest the villain into the lawfull bed of your loyall spouse, impudently entertaining him in steede of the deare father of your miserable and discomforted sonne, if the gods graunt him not

the grace speedilie to escape from a captiuity so vnworthie the degree he holdeth, and the race & noble familie of his ancestors. Is this the part of a queene, and daughter to a king? to liue like a bruite beast (and like a mare that yeeldeth her bodie to the horse that hath beaten hir companion awaye,) to followe the pleasure of an abhominable king that hath murthered a farre more honester and better man then himself in massacring Horuendile, the honor, and glory of the Danes, who are now esteemed of no force nor valour at all, since the shining splendure of knighthood, was brought to an end by the most wickedest, and cruellest villaine liuing vpon earth: I for my part will neuer account him for my kinsman, nor once knowe him for mine vncle, nor you my deer mother for not hauing respect to the blud that ought to haue vnited us so straightly together, & who neither with your honor nor without suspition of consent to the death of your husband could euer haue agreed to haue marryed with his cruell enemie: O Queene Geruthe, it is the part of a bitch, to couple with many, and desire acquaintance of diuers mastiffes: it is licentiousnes only that hath made you deface out of your minde the memory of the valor & vertues of the good King your husband and my father: it was an unbrideled desire that guided the daughter of Roderick to imbrace the Tirant Fengon, & not to remember Horuendile (vnworthy of so strange intertainment), neither that he killed his brother traiterously, and that shee being his fathers wife betrayed him, although he so well fauoured and loued her, that for her sake he vtterly bereaved Norway of her riches and valiant souldiers, to augment the treasures of Roderick, and make Geruthe wife to the hardyest prince in Europe. It is not the parte of a woman, much less of a princesse, in whome al modesty, curtesie, compassion and loue ought to abound, thus to leaue her deare child to fortune in th-

bloody & murtherous hands of a villain and traytor, bruite beasts do not so; for Lyons, Tygers, ounces, and leopards fight for the safety and defence of their whelpes; and birds that haue beakes, claws, and wings, resist such as would rauish them of their yong ones, but you to the contrary expose and deliuer mee to death, whereas ye should defend me. Is not this as much as if you should betray me, when you knowing the peruersenes of the tyrant and his intents, ful of deadly counsell as touching the race & image of his brother, haue not once sought nor desired to finde the meanes to saue your child (& only son) by sending him into Swethland, Norway, or England, rather then to leaue him as a pray to youre infamous adulterer? bee not offended I pray you Madame, if transported with dolour and griefe I speake so boldely vnto you, and that I respect you lesse then dutie requireth, for you hauing forgotten mee, and wholy reiected the memorye of the deceased K. my father, must not bee abashed if I also surpasse the bounds and limits of due consideration, Beholde into what distress I am now fallen, and to what mischiefe my fortune and your ouer great lightnesse, and want of wisdome haue induced mee, that I am constrained to playe the madde man to saue my life in steed of vsing and practising armes, following aduentures, and seeking all meanes to make my selfe knowne to bee the true and vndoubted heire to the valiant and vertuous King Horuendile, it was not without cause, and iuste occasion, y^{t} my gestures, countenances, and words seeme all to proceed from a madman, and that I desire to haue all men esteeme mee wholly depriued of sence and reasonable vnderstanding, bycause I am well assured, that he hath made no conscience to kill his owne brother, (accustomed to murthers, & allured with desire of gouernement without controll in his treasons) will not

spare to saue himselfe with the like crueltie, in the blood, & flesh of the loyns of his brother, by him massacred: & therefore, it is better for me to fayne madnesse then to vse my right sences as nature hath bestowed them vpon me, The bright shining clearnes thereof I am forced to hide vnder this shadow of dissimulation, as the sun doth hir beams vnder some great cloud, when the wether in sommer time ouercasteth: the face of a mad man, serueth to couer my gallant countenance, & the gestures of a fool are fit for me, to y^e^ end that guiding myself wisely therin I may preserue my life for y^e^ Danes, & the memory of my late deceased father, for y^t^ the desire of reuenging his death is so ingrauen in my heart y^t^ if I dye not shortly, I hope to take such and so great vengeance, that these Countryes shall foreuer speake thereof. Neuerthélesse I must stay the time, meanes, and occasion, lest by making ouer great hast, I be now the cause of mine owne sodaine ruine and ouerthrow, and by that meanes, end, before I beginne to effect my hearts desire: hee that hath to doe with a wicked, disloyall, cruell, and discourteous man, must vse craft, and politike inuentions, such as a fine witte can best imagine, not to discover his interprise: for seeing that by force I cannot effect my desire, reason alloweth me by dissimulation, subtiltie, and secret practises to proceed therein. To conclude, weepe not (Madame) to see my folly, but rather sigh and lament your owne offence, tormenting your conscience in regard of the infamie that hath so defiled the ancient renowne and glorie that (in times past) honoured Queene Geruth: for wee are not to sorrowe and grieue at other mens vices, but for our owne misdeedes, and great follyes. Desiring you, for the surplus of my proceedings, aboue all things (as you loue your owne life and welfare) that neither the king, nor any other may by any meanes know

We must vse subtiltie to a disloyall person.

We must weepe for our owne faults and not for other mens.

mine intent, and let me alone with the rest, for I hope in the ende to bring my purpose to effect.

Although the Queene perceiued herselfe neerly touched, and that Hamlet mooued her to the quicke, where she felt her selfe intressed: neuerthelesse shee forgot all disdaine & wrath, which thereby she might as then haue had, hearing her selfe so sharply, chiden & reprooued, for the ioy she then conceaued, to behold the gallant spirit of her sonne, and to thinke what she might hope, & the easier expect of his so great policie and wisdome. But on the other side she durst not lift vp her eyes to behold him, remembring her offence, & on the other side she would gladly haue imbraced her son, in regard of the wise admonitions by him giuen vnto her, which as then quenched the flames of unbridled desire y^t^ before had moued her to affect K. Fengon: to ingraff in her heart y^e^ vertuous actions of her lawfull spouse, whom inwardly she much lamented, when she beheld the liuely image and portraiture of his vertue & great wisedome in her childe, representing his fathers haughtie and valiant heart: and so ouercome and vanquished with this honest passion, and weeping most bitterly, hauing long time fixed her eyes vpon Hamlet, as beeing rauished into some great and deepe contemplation, & as it were wholy amazed; at the last imbracing him in her armes (with the like loue that a vertuous mother may or can vse, to kisse and entertaine her owne childe) she spake vnto him in this manner.

I know well (my Sonne) that I haue done thee great wrong in marrying with Fengon, the cruell tyrant and murtherer of thy father, and my loyall spouse: but when thou shalt consider the small meanes of resistance, and the treason of the Palace, with the little cause of confidence we are to expect or hope for of the Courtiers, all wrought to his will: as also the power hee made ready, if I should haue

refused to like of him, thou wouldest rather exc
then accuse me of lasciuiousnes or inconstai
much lesse offer me that wrong, to suspect
euer thy mother Geruthe once consented to
death & murther of her husband: swearing v
thee (by the maiestie of the Gods) that if it
layne in my power to haue resisted the tyr
although it had beene with the losse of my blc
yea and my life, I would surely haue saued the
of my Lord and husband, with as good a wil
desire, as since that time, I haue often been
meanes to hinder and impeach the shortning of
life, which being taken away, I will no longer
here vpon earth: for seeing that thy sences
whole and sound, I am in hope to see an e
meanes inuented for the reuenging of thy fatl
death. Neverthelesse, mine owne sweet sonne
thou hast pittie of thy selfe, or care of the mem
of thy father (although thou wilt do nothing
her that deserueth not the name of a mothe
this respect), I pray thee carie thine affayres wis
bee not hastie, nor ouer furious in thy interpri
neither yet aduance thy selfe more then reason s
mooue thee to effect thy purpose. Thou seest th
is not almost any man wherein thou mayest put
trust, nor any woman to whom I dare vtter the l
part of my secrets, that would not presently rep
it to thine aduersarie, who, although in outward sh
he dissembleth to love thee, the better to injoy
pleasures of me, yet hee distrusteth and feareth
for thy sake, and is not so simple to be easily
swaded, that thou art a foole or mad, so that if th
chance to doe any thing that seemeth to proceec
wisedome or policie (how secretly soeuer it be done
will presently be informed thereof, and I am grea
afraide that the deuils haue shewed him, what h
past at this present between vs: (Fortune so mu
pursueth and contrarieth our ease and welfare)

that this murther that now thou hast committed, be not the cause of both our destructions, which I by no meanes will seeme to know, but will keepe secret both thy wisedome & hardy interprise. Beseeching the Gods (my good sonne) that they, guiding thy heart, directing thy counsels and prospering thy interprise, I may see thee possesse and inioy that which is thy right, and weare the crowne of Denmarke, by the Tyrant taken from thee: that I may reioice in thy prosperitie, and therewith content my self, seeing with what courage and boldness thou shalt take vengeance vpon the murtherer of thy father, as also vpon all those that haue assisted and fauoured him in his murtherous and bloody enterprise. Madame (sayd Hamlet) I will put my trust in you, and from hencefoorth meane not to meddle further with your affayres, beseeching you (as you loue your own flesh and blood) that you will from hence foorth no more esteeme of the adulterer mine enemie, whom I wil surely kill, or cause to be put to death, in despite of all the deuils in hel: and haue he neuer so manie flattering courtezans[1] to defend him yet will I bring him to his death, & they themselues also shall beare him company therein: as they haue bin his perverse counsellors in the action of killing my father, and his companions in his treason, massacre, and cruell enterprise. And reason requireth, that euen as trayterously they then caused their prince to bee put to death, that with the like (nay well much more) iustice they should pay the interest of their fellonious actions.

Hother, father to Rodericke.

You know (Madame) how Hother your grandfather, and father to the good king Roderick, hauing vanquished Guimon, caused him to be burnt, for that the cruell vilain had done the like to his lord Geuare, whom he betrayed in the night time.

Guimon burnt his lord Geuare.

[1] Courtiers.

We must observe neither faithfulnesse or fidelitie to traytors or Parricides.

And who knoweth not that traytors and periu
persons deserve no faith nor loyaltie to be obseru
towardes them, and that conditions made with m
therers, ought to be esteemed as cobwebs, and
counted as if they were things neuer promised
agreed vpon: but if I lay handes vpon Fengon
will neither be fellonie nor treason, hee being neit
my King nor my Lord: but I shall iustly pun
him as my subiect, that hath disloyaly behaued hi
selfe against his Lord & soueraigne prince: a
seeing that glory is the rewarde of the vertuo
and the honour and praise of those that doe seru
to their naturall Prince, why should not blame a
dishonour accompany Traytors, & ignominie
death al those that dare be so bold as to lay viol
hands vpon sacred Kings, that are friends & co
panions of the gods, as representing their maies
& persons. To conclude, glorie is the crowne
vertue, & the price of constancie, and seeing tha
neuer accompanieth with infelicitie, but shunn
cowardize and spirits of base & trayterous conditio
it must necessarily followe, that either a glori
death will be mine ende, or with my sword in ha
(laden with tryumph and victorie) I shall berea
them of their liues, that made mine vnfortunate
darkened the beames of that vertue which I p
sessed from the blood and famous memory of
Predecessors. For why should men desire to li
when shame & infamie are the executioners t
torment their consciences, and villany is the ca
that withholdeth the heart from valiant interpri
and diuerteth the minde from honest desire
glorie and commendation, which indureth for eu
I know it is foolishly done, to gather fruit before
is ripe, & to seeke to enioy a benefit, not know
whither it belong to vs of right: but I hope
effect it so well, and haue so great confidence in
fortune (that hitherto hath guided the action

my life) that I shall not dye, without reuenging my selfe vpon mine enemie, and that himselfe shall be the instrument of his owne decay, and to execute that which of my selfe I durst not haue enterprised.

After this, Fengon (as if hee had beene out some long iourney) came to the Court againe, and asked for him that had receiued the charge to play the intelligencer, to entrap Hamlet, in his dissembled wisdome, was abashed to heare neither newes nor tydings of him, and for that cause asked Hamlet what was become of him: naming the man. The Prince that neuer vsed lying, and who in all the answers that euer he made (during his counterfeit madnesse) neuer strayed from the trueth (as a generous minde is a mortal enemie to vntruth) answered and sayd, that the counsellor he sought for, was gone downe through the priuie, where being choaked by the filthynesse of the place, the Hogs meeting him had filled their bellyes.

CHAPTER IIII.

How Fengon the third time deuised to send Hamblet to the king of England, with secret letters to haue him put to death: and how Hamblet, when his companions slept, read the Letters, and instead of them, counterfeited others, willing the king of England to put the two Messengers to death, and to marry his daughter to Hamblet, which was effected, and how Hamblet escaped out of England.

A MAN would have iudged any thing rather then that Hamblet had committed that murther, neuerthelesse Fengon could not content himselfe, but still his minde gaue him, that the foole would play him some tricke of Liegerdemaine, and willing would haue killed him, but he feared king Roder-

icke, his father in law, and further durst not offend the Queene, mother to the foole, whom she loued & much cherished: shewing great griefe and heauiness to see him so transported out of his wits. And in that conceit, seeking to bee rid of him, determined to finde the meanes to doe it by the ayde of a stranger, making the king of England minister of his massacring resolution, choosing rather that his friend should defile his renowne, with so great a wickednesse, then himselfe to fall into perpetuall infamie, by an exploit of so great crueltie, to whom hee purposed to send him, and by letters desire to him to put him to death.

Hamblet vnderstanding that he should be sent into England, presently doubted the occasion of his voyage, and for that cause speaking to the Queene, desired her not to make any shew of sorrow or griefe for his departure, but rather counterfeit a gladnesse, as being rid of his presence, whom, although she loued, yet she dayly grieued to see him in so pitifull estate, depriued of all sence and reason: desiring her further, that she should hang the hall with tapestrie, and make it fast with nayles upon the walles, and keepe the brands for him which he had sharpened at the points, then, when as he said he made arrowes to reuenge the death of his father: lastly, he counselled her, that the yeere after his departure being accomplished, she should celebrate his funerals: assuring her, that at the same instant, she should see him returne with great contentment and pleasure vnto her for that his voyage. Now to beare him company, were assigned two of Fengon's faithfull ministers, bearing Letters ingraved in wood, that contained Hamlets death, in such sort as he had aduertised the King of England. But the subtile Danish prince (beeing at sea) whilest his companions slept, hauing read the letters, and knowne his vncles great treason, with the wicked and villain-

ous mindes of the two courtyers that led him to the slaughter; raced out the letters that concerned his death, and in stead thereof graued others, with Commission to the king of England to hang his two companions, and not content to turne the death they had deiused against him vpon their owne neckes, wrote further, that king Fengon willed him, to gaue his daughter to Hamlet in mariage: and so arriuing in England, the Messengers presented themselues to the King, giuing him Fengons Letters; who hauing read the contents, sayd nothing as then, but stayed conuenient time to effect Fengons desire; meane time vsing the Danes familiarly, doing them that honour to sit at his table (for that kings as then were not so curiously nor solemnely serued as in these our dayes), for in these dayes meane kings and lords of small reuenewe are as difficult and hard to bee seene, as in times past the monarches of Persia vsed to be: or as it is reported of the great king of Aethyopia who (wil not permit any man to see his face, which ordinarily he couereth with a vaile.) And as the Messengers sate at the table with the king, subtile Hamlet was so far from being merry with them, that would not taste one bit of meate, bread, nor cup of beare whatsoeuer, as then set vpon the table, not without great wondering of the company, abashed to see a yong man and a stranger, not to esteeme of the delicate meates & pleasant drinkes serued at the banquet, reiecting them as things filthy, euill of tast, & worse prepared. The king who for that time dissembled what he thought, caused his ghests to be conueyed into their chamber, willing one of his secret seruantes to hide himselfe therein, & so certifie him what speeches past among the Danes at their going to bed.

Hamblets craft to save his life.

Now they were no sooner entred into the chamber, and those that were appointed to attend vpon them gone out, but Hamlets companions asked

him, why he refused to eate and drinke of that which hee found vpon the table, not honouring the banquet of so great a king, that entertained them in friendly sort, with such honour and courtesie as it deserued: saying further, that hee did not well, but dishonoured him that sent him, as if he sent men into England that feared to bee poysoned, by so great a king. The Prince that had done nothing without reason and prudent consideration, answered them and sayd: What think you, that I wil eat bread dipt in humane blood, and defile my throate with the rust of yron, and vse that meat that stinketh and sauoureth of mans flesh. already putrified and corrupted, and that senteth like the sauour of a dead carryon long since cast into a valt: and how would you haue mee to respect the King, that hath the countenance of a slaue, and the Queene who in stead of great majestie, hath done three things more like a woman of base parentage, & fitter for a waiting Gentlewoman then beseeming a Lady of her qualitie and estate: & hauing sayd so, vsed many iniurious & sharpe speeches as well against the king & queene, as others that had assisted at that banquet for the intertainment of the Danish Ambassadors: and therein Hamblet said trueth, as hereafter you shall heare, for that in those dayes, the North parts of the worlde liuing as then under Sathans lawes, were full of inchanters, so that there was not any yong gentleman whatsoeuer, that knew not something therein sufficient to serue his turne, if need required: as yet in those dayes in Gothland & Biarmy, there are many y^{t} knew not what the christian religion permitteth, as by reading the histories of Norway & Gothland you may easilie perceiue: and so Hamlet, while his father liued had been instructed in that deuilish art, whereby the wicked spirite abuseth mankind, and aduertiseth him (as he can) of things past.

It toucheth not the matter herein to discouer the parts of deuination in man, and whether this prince by reason of his ouer great melancholy, had receiued those impressions, deuining that, which neuer any but himselfe had before declared, like the Philosophers, who discoursing of diuers deep points of philosophie, attribute the force of those diuinations to such as are Saturnists by complection who, oftentimes speake of things which their fury ceasing, they then alreadye can hardly vnderstand who are the pronouncers, and for that cause Plato saith, many deuiners and many poets, after the force and vigour of theire fier beginneth to lessen, do hardly vnderstand what they haue written, although intreating of such things, while the spirite of deuination continueth vpon them, they doe in such sort discourse thereof that the authors and inuenters of the arts themselues by them alledged commend their discourses & subtill disputations. Likewise I mean not to relate y^{t} which diuers men beleeue y^{t} a reasonable soul, becommeth y^{e} habitation of a meaner sort of diuels, by whom men learn the secrets of things natural, & much lesse do I account of y^{e} supposed gouernors of y^{e} world fained by magitians by whose means they brag to effect meruailous things; It would seeme miraculous y^{t} Hamlet shold divine in y^{t} sort, which after prooued so true (if as I said before) the diuel had not knowledg of things past, but to grant it he knoweth things to come I hope you shall neuer finde me in so grose an error, you will compare and make equall deriuation, & coniecture with those that are made by the spirit of God, and pronounced by the holy prophets, that tasted of that maruelous science, to whome onely, was declared the secrets & wondrous workes of the almighty. Yet there are some imposturious companions that impute so much deuinitie to the Diuell the father of lyes, y^{t} they

attribute vnto him the truth of the knowledge of thinges that shall happen vnto men, alledging the conference of Saul with the witch although one example out of the holy scriptures, specially set down for the condemnation of wicked man is not of force to giue a sufficient law to all the world, for they themselues confesse, that they can deuine, not according to the vniuersal cause of things, but by signes borrowed from such like causes, which are all waies alike, and by those coniectures they can giue iudgement of thinges to come, but all this beeing grounded vpon a weake support, (which is a simple coniecture) & hauing so slender a foundation, as some foolish or late experience the fictions being voluntarie, It should be a great folly in a man of good iudgment specially one that imbraceth the preachn of the gospell, & seeketh after no other but the trueth thereof, to repose vpon any of these likelihoods or writings full of deceipt.

As touching magical operations, I will grant them somewhat therein, finding diuers histories y^t^ write thereof, & that the Bible maketh mention and forbiddeth the vse thereof, yea the lawes of the gentiles and ordinances of Emperors, haue bin made against it, in such sort, that Mahomet the great Hereticke & friend of the Diuell by whose subtiltyes hee abused most part of the East countries hath ordained great punishments for such as vse and practise those unlawfull & damnable arts which for this time leauing of, let vs returne to Hamblet, brought vp in these abuses, according to the manner of his country, whose companions hearing his answere reproached him of folly, saying that hee could by no meanes show a greater point of indiscretion, Then In despising that which is lawfull, and reiecting that which all men receaued, as a necessary thing and that hee had not grossely so forgotten himselfe, as in y^t^ sort to accuse such and so excellent a man as the king of England, and to slander

the Queene, being then as famous and wise a princes, as any at that day raigning in the Ilands thereabouts, to cause him to be punished, according to his deserts, but he continuing in his dissimulation, mocked him, saying that hee had not done any thing that was not good & most true: on the other side the King being aduertised therof by him that stood to heare the discourse, iudged presently that Hamlet speaking so ambiguously was either a perfect foole, or else one of the wisest princes in his time, answering so sodainly, and so much to the purpose, vpon the demaund by his companions, made touching his behauiour, and the better to finde the trueth caused the babler to be sent for, of whome inquiring in what place the corne grew whereof he made bread for his table, and whether in that ground there were not some signes or newes of a battaile fought whereby humaine blood had therein been shed, the babler answered that not far from thence there lay a field ful of dead mens bones: in times past slaine in a battaile, as by the greate heapes of wounded scullea, mighte well appeare and for that the grounds in that parte was become fertiler then other grounds by reason, of the fatte and humours of the dead bodies, y^{t} euery yeer the farmers vsed there to haue in y^{e} best wheat they could finde to serue his majesties house. The King perceiuing it to be true, according to the yong princes wordes, asked where the hogs had bin fed that were killed to be serued at his table, and answere was made him, that those hogs getting out of the saide fielde wherein they were kepte had found the bodie of a thiefe that had beene hanged for his demerits, and had eaten thereof: whereat the King of England beeing abashed, would needs know with what water the beer he vsed to drinke of, had beene brued, which hauing knowne, he caused the riuer to be digged somewhat deeper, and therin found great store of

swords and rustie armours, that gaue an ill savour to the drinke. It were good that I should heere dilate somewhat of Merliūs prophesies which are said to be spoken of him before he was fuly one yeere old, but if you consider wel what hath al reddy been spoken it is no hard matter to diuine of things past, although the minister of Sathan therein played his part giuing sodaine and prompt answeres, to this yong prince, for that herein are nothing but natural things, such as were wel known to be true, and therefore not needfull to dreame of thinges to come. This knowne, the King greatly moued with a certaine curiositie, to knowe why the Danish prince saide that he had the countenance of a slaue suspecting thereby that he reproached the basenes of his blood and that he wold affirme that neuer any prince had bin his sire, wherin to satisfie himselfe, he went to his mother, and leading her into a secret chamber, which he shut as soone as they were entted desired her of her honour to shewe him of whome he was ingendred in this world. The good Lady, wel assured that neuer any man had bin acquainted w^{t} her loue, touching any other man then her husband, sware that the King her husband onely was the man that enioyed the pleasures of her body, but the king hir sonne, alreadie with the truth of the Danish princes answers, threatned his mother to make her tell by force, if otherwise she would not confesse it, who for feare of death acknowledged that she had prostrated her body to a slaue, & made him father to the king of England whereat the king was abashed and wholy ashamed, I giue them leaue to Iudge who esteeming themselues honester than theire neighbours, & supposing that there can be nothing amisse in their houses, make more enquirie then is requisite to know y^{e} which they would rather not haue known, neuerthelesse dissembling what he thought, & biting vpon the bridle, rather than he would depriue him-

selfe, by publishing the lasciuiousnes of his mother, thought better to leaue a great sin vnpunished, then thereby to make himselfe contemptible to his subiects, who peraduenture would haue reiected him as not desiring to haue a bastard to raigne ouer so great a kingdome.

But as he was sorry to hear his mother's confession, on the otherside he tooke great pleasure in the subtilry, and quick spirit of the yong prince, and for that cause went vnto him to aske him why he had reprooved three things in his Queene conuenient for a slaue, and sauouring more of basenes then of royaltie, & far unfit for the maiesty of a great prince, The king not content to haue receiued a great displeasure by knowing him selfe to be a bastard, & to haue heard w^t^ what injuries he charged her whom hee loued best in all the world, would not content himself vntill he also vnderstood y^t^ which displeased him, as much as his owne proper disgrace, which was that his Queen was the daughter of a chambermaid and with all noted certaine foolish countenances, she made, which not onely shewed of what parentage she came, but also y^t^ hir humors sauored of the basenes and low degree of hir parents, whose mother he assured the king was as then yet holden in seruitude. The king admiring the young, prince, and behoulding in him some matter of greater respect then in the common sort of men, gaue him his daughter in marriage, according to the counterfet letters by him deuised, & the next day caused the two seruants of Fengon to be executed, to satisfie, as he thought the king's desire; but Hamlet, although y^e^ sport plesed him wel, & that the King of England could not haue done him a greater fauour, made as though he had been much offended, threatening the king to be reuenged, but the King to appease him gaue him a great sum of gold, which Hamlet caused to be molten, and put it into two staues, made hollow for

the same purpose, to serue his tourne there with as neede should require, for of all other the kings treasures he took nothing w^t^ him into Denmark but onely those two staues, and as soone as the yeere began to bee at an end hauing somewhat before obtained licence of the King his father in law to depart, went for Denmarke, Then with all the speed hee could to returne againe into England to marry his daughter and so set sayle for Denmarke.

CHAPTER V.

How Hamblet hauing escaped out of England, arriued in Denmarke the same day that the Danes were celebrating his funerals, supposing him to be dead in England, and how he reuenged his fathers death vpon his Vncle and the rest of the Courtiers; and what followed:

HAMBLET in that sort sayling into Denmark, being arriued in the contry entred into the pallace of his Uncle the same day that they were celebrating his funeralls, and going into the Hall, procured no small astonishment and wonder to them all, no man thinking other but that hee had beene deade; among the which many of them reioyced not a little, for the pleasure which they knew Fengon would conceaue for so pleasant a losse, and some were sadde, as remembring the honourable king Horuendile, whose victories they could by no meanes forget, much lesse deface out of theire memories that which apperteined vnto him, who as then greatly reioyced to see a false report spread of Hamlets death, and that the tyrant had not as yet obtained his will of the heire of Jutie, but rather hoped God would restore him to his sences againe for the good and welfare of that province. Their

amazement at the last beeing tourned into laughter, all that as then were assistant at the funerall banquet, of him whome they esteemed dead, mocked each at other, for hauing beene so simply deceiued, and wondring at the Prince, that in his so long a voyage he had not recouered any of his sences, asked what was become of them that had borne him company into greate Brittain, to whom he made answere (shewing them the two hollow staues, wherein he had put his molten golde, that the king of England had giuen him to appease his fury, concerning the murther of his two companions) and said, here they are both. Whereat many that already knew his humours, presently coniectured that hee had plaide some tricke of legerdemane, and to deliuer himselfe out of danger, had throwne them into the pitte prepared for him, so that fearing to follow after them and light vpon some euil adventure, they went presently out of the court, and it was well for them that they didde so, considering the Tragedy acted by him the same daie, beeing accounted his funerall, but in trueth theire last daies, that as then reioyced for their ouerthrow; for when euery man busied himselfe to make good cheare, and Hamlets ariuall prouoked them more to drinke and carouse, the prince himselfe at that time played the Butler and a gentleman attending on the tables, not suffering the pots nor goblets to bee empty, whereby hee gaue the noble men such store of liquor, that all of them being ful laden with wine, and, gorged with meate, were constrained to lay themselues downe in the same place where they had supt, so much their sences were dulled, and ouercome with the fire of ouer great drinking, (a uice common and familiar among the Almaines, and other nations inhabiting the north parts of y^e^ wor[l]d) which when Hamlet perceiuing, & finding so good opportunitie to effect his purpose & bee reuenged

Drunkenes a vice over common in the north partes of the world.

of his enemies, & by y^e^ means to abandon the actions gestures & apparel of a mad man, occasion so fitly finding his turn, & as it were effecting it selfe failed not to take hold therof, & seeing those drunken bodies, filled with wine, lying like hogs, vpon the ground, some sleeping, others vomiting the ouer great abundance of wine which without measure they had swallowed vp, made the hangings about the hall to fall downe & couer them all ouer, which he nailed to the ground, being boorded, & at the endes thereof he stuck the brands whereof I spake before by him sharpned, which serued for prickes, binding and tying the hangings, in such sort, that what force soeuer they vsed to loose themselues, it was vnpossible to get from vnder them, and presently he set fire in the foure corners of the hal, in such sort that all that were as then therin not one escaped away but were forced to purge their sins by fire, & dry up the great aboundance of liquor by them receiued into their bodies, all of them dying in the vneuitable and mercilesse flames of the whot & burning fire which the prince perceiuing, became wise, & knowing y^t^ his vncle before the end of the banquet had withdrawn himselfe into his chamber, which stood apart from the place where the fire burnt, went thither, & entring into y^e^ chamber, layd hand vpon the sword of his fathers murtherer, leauing his own in the place, which while he was at the banket some of the courtiers had nailed fast into the scaberd, & going to Fengon said, I wonder disloyal king how thou canst sleep heer at thine ease: & al thy pallace is burnt the fire thereof hauing burnt y^e^ greatest part of thy courtiers & ministers of thy cruelty, & detestable tirannies, & which is more I cannot imagin how thou sholdst wel assure thy self, & thy estate, as now to take thy ease, seeing Hamlet so neer thee armed with y^e^ shafts by him prepared long since &

A strange reuenge taken by Hamlet.

A mocke but yet sharp and stinging, giuen by Hamlet to his vncle.

and at this present is redy to reuenge the traiterous iniury by thee done to his Lord & Father.

Fengon as then knowing y^e^ truth of his nephews subtile practise, & hering him speak w^t^ stayed mind, and which is more, perceiued a sword naked in his hand, which he already lifted vp to depriue him of his life, leaped quickly out of the bed, taking holde of Hamlets sworde, that was nayled into the scaberd, which as hee sought to pull out, Hamlet gaue him such a blowe vpon the cliine of the necke, that hee cut his head cleane from his shoulders, and as he fell to the ground sayd: This iust and violent death is a first reward for such as thou art, now go thy wayes, & when thou commest in hell, see thou forget not to tell thy brother (whom thou trayterously slewest) that it was his sonne that sent thee thither with the message, to the ende that beeing comforted thereby, his soule may rest among the blessed spirits, and quit mee of the obligation which bound me to pursue his vengeance vpon mine owne blood, that seeing it was by thee, that I lost the chiefe thing that tyed me to this aliance & consanguinitie. A man (to say the trueth) hardie, couragious, and worthy of eternall commendation, who arming himself with a crafty, dissembling and strange shew of beeing distract out of his wits, vnder that pretence deceiued the wise, pollitike, and craftie: thereby not onelie preseruing his life from the treasons & wicked practises of the Tyrant, but (which is more) by an new & vnexpected kinde of punishment reuenged his fathers death: many yeeres after the act committed: in no such sort that directing his courses with such patience, & effecting his purposes, with so great boldnes & constancie, he left a iudgement to be decyded among men of wisdom, which was more commendable in him, his constancy or magnanimitie, or his wisdom

Commendation of Hamlet for killing the Tyrant.

in ordring his affaires, according to the premeditable determination he had conceaued.

How iust vengeance ought to be considered.

If vengeance euer seemed to haue any shew of iustice, it is then, when pietie and affection constraineth vs to remember our fathers uniustly murdred, as the things wherby we are dispensed withal, & which seeke the means not to leaue treason and murther vnpunished: seeing Dauid a holy & iust king, & of nature simple, courteous and debonaire, yet when he dyed he charged his sonne Salomon (that succeeded him in his throane) not to suffer certaine men that had done him iniurie to escape vnpunished: Not that this holy King (as then readie to dye, and to giue account before God of all his actions) was carefull or desirous of reuenge, but to leaue this example vnto us, that where the Prince or Country is interessed, the desire of reuenge cannot by any meanes (how small soeuer) beare the title of condemnation, but is rather commendable and worthy of praise: for otherwise the good kings of Iuda, nor others had not pursued them to death, that had offended their predecessors, if God himselfe had not inspired and ingrauen that desire within their hearts. Hereof the Athenian lawes beare witnesse, whose custome was to erect Images in remembrance of those men that, reuenging the iniuries of the Common wealth, boldly massacred tyrants and such as troubled the peace and welfare of the Citizens.

Dauids intent in commanding Salomon to reuenge him of some of his enemies.

Hamblet hauing in this manner reuenged himselfe, durst not presently declare his action to the people, but to the contrary determined to worke by policie, so to giue them intelligence, what he had done, and the reason that drewe him thereunto; so that beeing accompanied with such of his fathers friends, that then were rising, he stayed to see what the people would doe, when they shoulde heare of that sodaine and fearefull action. The next morn-

ing the Townes bordering there aboutes, desiring to know from whence the flames of fire proceeded the night before they had seene, came thither, and perceiuing the kings Pallace burnt to ashes, & many bodyes (most part consumed) lying among the rvines of the house, all of them were much abashed, nothing being left of the Palace but the foundation: but they were much more amased to beholde the body of the king all bloody, & his head cut off lying hard by him, whereat some began to threaten reuenge, yet not knowing against whom: others beholding so lamentable a spectacle armed themselues, the rest reioycing, yet not daring to make any shewe thereof, some detesting the crueltie, others lamenting the death of their Prince, but the greatest part calling Horuendiles murther to remembrance, acknowledging a iust iudgement from aboue, that had throwne downe the pride of the Tyrant: and in this sort, the diuersities of opinions among that multitude of the people, being many, yet euery man ignorant what would be the issue of that Tragedie, none stirred from thence, neither yet attempted to moue any tumult, euery man fearing his owne skinne, and distrusting his neighbour, esteeming each other to bee consenting to the massacre.

CHAPTER VI.

How Hamlet hauing slaine his uncle, and burnt his Palace, made an Oration to the Danes, to shew them what he done: and how they made him king of Denmarke, and what followed.

HAMLET then seeing y^e^ people to be so quiet, & most part of them not vsing any words, all searching onely and simply the cause of this ruine and

destruction, not minding to loose any time, but ayding himself with the commodotie thereof, entred among the multitude of people, and standing in the middle spake vnto them, as followeth.

If there be any among you (good people of Denmark) that as yet haue fresh within your memories, the wrong done to the valiant king Horuendile, let him not be mooued, nor thinke it strange to behold the confused, hydeous and fearefull spectacle of this present calamitie: if there be any man that affecteth fidelitie, and alloweth of the loue and dutie that man is bounde to shewe his parents, and find it a iust cause to call to remembrance the iniuryes and wrongs that have been done to our progenitors, let him not bee ashamed beholding this massacre, much less offended to see so fearefull a ruine both of men and of the brauest house in all this countrey: for the hand that hath done this iustice, could not effect it by any other meanes, neither yet was it lawfull for him to doe it otherwise, then by ruinating both sensible and vnsensible things, thereby to preserue the memorie of so iust a vengeance.

I see well (my good friends) & am very glad to know so good attention and deuotion in you, that you are sorrie (before your eyes) to see Fengon so murthered, and without a head, which heeretofore you acknowledged for your Commander: but I pray you remember, this body is not the body of a king, but of an execrable tyrant, and a parricide most detestable. Oh Danes, the spectacle was much more hydeous, when Horuendile your king was murthered by his brother, What should I say a brother? nay rather, by the most abhominable executioner that euer beheld the same. It was you that saw Horuendiles members massacred, and that with teares and lamentations accompanied him to the graue: his body disfigured, hurt in a thousand places, & misused in ten times as many fashions;

and who doubteth (seeing experience hath taught you) that the Tyrant (in massacring your lawfull king) sought onely to infringe the auncient Liberties of the common people? and it was one hand onely, that murthering Horuendile, cruelly dispoyled him of life, and by the same meanes uniustly bereaued you of your auncient liberties, & delighted more in oppression then to embrace the plesant countenance of prosperous libertie, without aduenturing for the same? And what mad man is he, that delighteth more in the tyrrany of Fengon, then in the clemencie and renewed courtesie of Horuendile? If it bee so, that by clemencie and affabilitie, the hardest and stoutest hearts are molified and made tractable, and that euill and hard vsage causeth subiects to be outrageous and vnruly: why behold you not the debonair cariage of the first, to compare it w^t^ the cruelties & insolencies of the second, in euery respect as cruell & barbarous, as his brother was gentle, meeke and courteous. Remember, O you Danes remember, what loue and amitie Horuendile shewed vnto you, with what equitie and iustice he swayed the great affaires of this kingdome, and with what humanitie and courtisie he defended & cherished you, and then I am assured that the simplest man among you will both remember and acknowledge, that he had a most peaceable, iust, & righteous king taken from him, to place in his throane a tyrant and murtherer of his brother: one that hath peruerted all right, abolished the auncient Lawes of our fathers, contaminated the memories of our ancestors, & by his wickednesse polluted the integritie of this kingdome, vpon the necke thereof hauing placed the troublesome yoak of heauie seruitude, abolishing that libertie wherein Horuendile vsed to maintaine you, and suffred you to liue at your ease, and should you now bee sorrie to see the ende of your mischiefes, & that this miserable wretch,

pressed downe with the burthen of his offences, at this present payeth the vsury of the parricide committed vpon the body of his brother, & would not himselfe be the reuenger of the outrage done to me, whom he sought to depriue of mine inheritance, taking from Denmark a lawfull successor, to plant a wicked stranger, & bring into captiuitie those that my father had infranchised, and deliuered out of misery and bondage? And what man is he that hauing any sparke of wisdom, would esteem a good deed to be an iniury, & account pleasures equal with wrongs & euident outrages? It were then great folly & temerity in Princes & valiant commanders in the wars, to expose themselues to peril & hazards of their liues, for the welfare of the common people, if y^t^ for a recompence they should reape hatred and indignation of the multitude, to what end should Hother haue punished Balder, if in steed of recompence, the Danes and Swethlanders had banished him to receiue and accept the successors of him that desired nought but his ruine and ouerthrowe? What is hee that hath so small feeling of reason & equitie, that would be grieued to see treason rewarded with the like, and that an euill act is punished with iust demerit, in the partie himselfe that was the occasion: who was euer sorrowfull to behold the murtherer of innocents brought to his end: of what man weepeth to see a iust massacre done vpon a Tyrant, vsurper, villaine and bloody personage?

I perceiue you are attentiue, & abashed for not knowing the author of your deliuerance, and sorry that you cannot tell to whom you should bee thankefull for such & so great a benefit as the destruction of a tyrant, and the ouerthrow of the place, that was the storehouse of his villanies, and the true receptacle of all the theeues and traytors in this kingdome: but beholde (here in your

presence) him that brought so good an enterprise to effect. It is I (my good friends) it is I that confesse I haue taken vengeance, for the violence done vnto my lord & father, and for the subiection and seruitude that I perceiued in this Countrey, whereof I am the iust and lawfull successor. It is I alone, that haue done this piece of worke, whereunto you ought to haue lent me your handes, and therein haue ayded and assisted me, I haue only accomplished that, which all of you might iustly haue effected, by good reason, without falling into any point of treason or fellonie: it is true that I hope so much of your good willes, towards the deceased king Horuendile, & that the remembrances of his vertues is yet so fresh within your memories, that if I had required your aide herein, you would not haue denied it, specially to your naturall prince. But it liked mee best to doe it my selfe alone, thinking it a good thing to punish the wicked, without hazarding the liues of my friends and loyall subiects, not desiring to burthen other mens shoulders, with this weight, for that I made account to effect it well inough without exposing any man into danger, & by publishing the same should cleane haue ouerthrowne the deuice, which at this present I haue so happily brought to passe. I haue burnt the bodyes of the courtiers to ashes, being companions in the mischiefs and treasons of the tyrant, but I haue left Fengon whole, that you might punish his dead carkasse (seeing that when hee liued you durst not lay hands vpon him) to accomplish the full punishment and vengeance due vnto him, and so satisfie your choller vpon the bones of him, that filled his greedy hands and coffers with your riches, and shed the blood of your brethren and friends. Bee ioyfull then (my good friends) make ready the nose-gay for this vsurping King, burne his abhominable body, boyle his lasciuious members, and cast the ashes of

him that hath beene hurtfull to all the world, into the ayre; driue from you the sparkes of pitie, to the end that neither siluer, nor christall cup, nor sacred tombe may be the restfull habitation of the reliques & bones of so detestable a man: let not one trace of a parricide be seene, nor your countrey defiled with the presence of the least member of this tyrant without pity, that your neighbors may not smell the contagion, nor our land the polluted infection of a body condemned for his wickednes: I haue done my part, to present him to you in this sort, now it belongs to you to make an ende of the worke, & put to the last hand of dutie, whereunto your seuerall functions call you, for in this sort you must honor abhominable princes: and such ought to be the funerall of a tyrant, parricide, and vsurper both of the bed & patrimony, that no way belonged vnto him, who hauing bereaued his countrey of liberty, it is fit that the land refuse to giue him a place for the eternal rest of his bones.

O my good friends seeing you know the wrong that hath bin done vnto mee, what my griefs are & in what misery I haue liued since the death of the king, my Lord & father, and seeing that you haue both known and tasted these things then, when as I could not conceiue the outrage that I felt: what neede I recite it vnto you? what benefit would it be to discouer it before them, that knowing it, would burst (as it were with despight) to heare of my hard chance, and curse Fortune for so much imbasing a royall prince, as to depriue him of his maiesty, although not any of you durst so much as shew one sight of sorrow or sadnes? You know how my father in law conspired my death, & sought by diuers meanes to take away my life, how I was forsaken of the Q. my mother, mocked of my friends, and dispised of mine own subiects, hetherto I haue liued laden with griefe, and wholy confounded in teares,

my life still accompanied with fear and suspition, expecting the houre when the sharp sword would make an ende of my life and miserable anguishes, how many times counterfeiting y^e^ mad man, haue I heard you pitty my distresse, & secretly lament to see mee disinherited, and yet no man sought to reuenge the death of my father, nor to punish the treason of my incestuous vncle, full of murthers & massacres? This charitie ministred comfort, and your affectionate complaints made me euidently see your good wills, that you had in memorie the calamity of your prince, & within your harts ingrauen the desire of vengeance for the death of him that deserued a long life: & what heart can bee so hard & vntractable, or spirit so seuere, cruel and rigorous, that would not relent at the remembrance of my extremities, and take pitty of an Orphan child, so abandoned of the world? What eyes were so voyd of moysture, but would distill a field [flood] of tears, to see a poore Prince assaulted by his owne subiects, betrayed by his mother, pursued by his vncle, & so much oppressed, that his friends durst not shew the effects of their charitie and good affection? O (my good friends) shew pity to him whom you haue nourished, and let your harts take some compassion vpon the memory of my misfortunes: I speak to you that are innocent of al treason, & neuer defiled your hands spirits nor desires with the blud of the greate & vertuous king Horuendile. Take pity vpon the queen some time your soueraign lady, & my right honorable mother, forced by the tyrant, and reioyce to see the end & extinguishing of the object of her dishonor, which constrained her to be lesse pitiful to her own blood so far as to imbrace the murtherer of her own dear spouse, charging her selfe with a double burthen of infamy & incest, together w^t^ iniuring and disanulling of her house, & the ruine of her race. This hath bin y^e^ the occasion y^t^ made

me counterfet folly, & couer my intents vnder a vaile of meer madnes, which hath wisdom and pollicy thereby to inclose the fruit of this vengeance which y^t it hath attained to the ful point of efficacy & perfect accomplishment you your selues shall bee iudges, for touching this & other things concerning my profit, & the managing of great affaires, I refer my self to your counsels, & therunto am fully determined to yeeld, as being those y^t trample vnder your feet the murtherers of my father, & despise the ashes of him that hath polluted and violated the spouse of his brother, by him massacred, y^t hath committed felony against his Lord, traiterously assailed the majesty of his king & odiously thralled his contry vnder seruitude and bondage, & you his loyall subiects from whom he bereauing your liberty, feared not to ad incest to parricide, detestable to al the world, to you also it belongeth by dewty & reason commonly to defend & protect Hamlet the minister, and executor of iust vengeance who being iealous of your honour & reputation, hath hazarded himself, hoping you will serue him for fathers, defenders, & tutors, & regarding him in pity, restore him to his goods and inheritances, It is I y^t haue taken away the infamy of my contry, and extinguished the fire y^t imbraced your fortunes, I haue washed the spots y^t defiled the reputation of the queen, ouerthrowing both the tirant & the tiranny and beguiling the subtilities of the craftiest deceiuer in the world, and by that meanes brought his wickednes and impostures to an end; I was grieued at the iniurie committed both to my father, & my natiue country, and haue slaine him that vsed more rigorus commandements ouer you, then was either iust or conuenient to be used vnto men that haue commaunded the valiantest nations in the world. Seeing then he was such a one to you, it is reason, that you acknowledge the benefit & thinke wel of

for the good I had done your posterity, & admiring my spirit & wisdome, chuse me your king, if you think me worthy of the place, you see I am the author of your preseruation, heire of my fathers kingdome, not straying in any point from his vertuous action, no murtherer, violent parricide, nor man y^t^ euer offended any of you but only the vitious, I am lawfull successor in the kingdome, and iust reuenger of a crime aboue al others most grieuous & punishable: it is to me, that you owe the benefit of your liberty receaued, and of the subuersion of that tyranny y^t^ so much afflicted you: that hath troden vnder feete the yoke of the tirant, and ouerwhelmed his throne, and taken y^e^ scepter out of the hands, of him that abused a holy and iust authoritie, but it is you y^t^ are to recompence those y^t^ haue well deserued, you know what is the reward of so greate desert, & being in your hands to distribute the same, it is of you, that I demand the price of my vertue and the recompence of my victory.

This oration of the yong prince so mooued the harts of the Danes, and wan the affections of the nobility, that some wept for pity other for ioy, to see the wisedome and gallant spirit of Hamlet, and hauing made an end of their sorrow, al with one consent proclaimed him king of *Jutie and Chersonnese, at this present the proper country of Denmarke*, and having celebrated his coronation, and receiued the homages and fidelities of his subjects, he went into England to fetch his wife, and reioyced with his father in law, touching his good fortune, but it wanted little that the king of England had not accomplished that which Fengon with all his subtilities could neuer attaine.

Hamlet king of one part of Denmark.

CHAPTER VII.

How Hamlet after his coronation went into England, and how the king of England secretly would haue put him to death, and how he slew the king of England: and returned againe into Denmarke with two wiues, and what followed.

HAMLET being in England shewed the King what meanes hee had wrought to recouer his kingdom, but when the king of England vnderstood of Fengons death, he was both abashed and confused in his minde, at that instant feeling himselfe assailed with two great passions, for that in times past, he and Fengon hauing bin companions together in armes, had giuen each other their faith & promises, by oath, that if either of them chanced to bee slaine by any man whatsoeuer, hee that suruiued (taking the quarrel vpon him as his owne) should neuer cease till he were reuenged or at the leaste do his endeauour. This promise incited the barbarous king to massacre Hamlet, but the alliance, presenting it selfe before, his eies, and beholding the one deade although his friend, and the other aliue, and husband to his daughter, made him deface [1] his desire of reuenge. But in the end the conscience of his oath and promise obtained the vpper hand, and secretly made him conclude the death of his sonne in law, which enterprise after that was cause of his own death and ouerrunning of the whole country of England by the cruelty and despight conceiued by the King of Denmarke. I haue purposely omitted the discourse of that battaile, as not much pertinent to our matter, as also, not to trouble you with too tedious a discourse, being content to shew you the end of this wise & valiant king Hamlet, who

[1] [Mr. Collier proposed to read *defer*.]

reuenging himselfe vpon so many enemies, & discouering all the treasons practised against his life, in the end serued for a sport to fortune, & an example to all great personages, that trust ouermuch to the felicities of this world, y^t^ are of small moment, & lesse continuance.

The king of England perceiuing that hee could not easilie effect his desire vpon the king his son in lawe, as also not being willing to break the laws, & rights of Hospitality, determined to make a stranger the reuenger of his iniury, & so accomplish his oath made to Fengon without defiling his handes w^t^ the blood of the husband of his daughter, & polluting his house by the traiterous massacring of his friend. In reading of this history it seemeth Hamlet should resemble an other Hercules, sent into diuers places of the world, by Euristheus (solicited by Iuno) where he knew any dangerous aduenture, thereby to ouerthrow & destroy him, or else Bellerophon sent to Ariobatus to put him to death, or (leaving prophane histories,) an other Vrias by King Dauid appointed to bee placed in the fore front of the battaile, and the man that should bee first slain by the Barbarians. For the King of Englands wife being dead not long before, (although he cared not for marrying an other woman) desired his sonne in lawe to make a voyage for him into Scotland, flattering him in such sort, that he made him beleeue that his singular wisdome caused him to preferre him to that ambassage, assuring himselfe that it were impossible that Hamlet the subtillest & wisest prince in the worlde should take anything in the world in hand without effecting the same.

Now the queen of Scots beeing a maid and of a haughty courage, despised marriage with al men, as not esteeming any worthy to be her companion, in such manner that by reason of this arrogant opinion there neuer came any man to desire her loue but she

caused him to loose his life: but the Danish Kings fortune was so good that Hermetrude (for so was the queens name,) hearing that Hamlet was come thither to intreat a marriage between her and the king of England, forgot all her pride, & dispoiling herselfe of her sterne nature, being as then determined to make him (being the greatest prince as then liuing) her husband, & deprive the English princesse of her spouse whome shee thought fit for no men[1] but herself, & so this Amazon without loue disdaining Cupid, by her free wil submitted her haughtie mind to her concupiscence. The Dane arriving in her court, desired she to see the old king of Englands letters & mocking at his fond appetites, whose blood as then was half congealed, cast her eies vpon the yong and plesant Adonis of the North, esteeming her selfe happy to haue such a pray fall into her hands wherof she made her ful account to haue the possession, & to conclude she y^t^ neuer had been ouercome by the grace, courtesie, valor or riches of anie prince nor Lord whatsoeuer, was as then vanquished w^t^ the onelie report of the subtilties of the Dane who knowing that he was already fianced to the daughter of the king of England, spake vnto him & said, I neuer looked for so great a blisse, neither from the Gods, nor yet from fortune, as to behold in my countries, the most compleate prince in the north, & he that hath made himselfe famous & renowned through all the nations of the world, as well neighbours as strangers, for the only respect of his vertue wisdom & good fortune, seruing him much iu the pursuite & effect of diuers thinges by him vndertaken, & thinke my selfe much beholding to the king of England (although his malice seeketh neither my aduancement nor the good of you my

[1] [So the old copy; perhaps, as suggested by Mr. Collier, we should read *one*.]

Lord) to do me so much honor as to send me so excellent a man to intreate of a marriage (he being olde & a mortal enemy to me and mine) with mee that am such a one as euery man seeth, is not desirous to couple with a man of so base quality as he, whom you haue said to be y^e^ son of a slave, but on the other side I maruel y^t^ the son of Horuendile, and grand-child to king Roderick, he that by his foolish wisedom, & fained madnesse surmounted the forces & subtilties of Fengon, & obtained the kingdom of his aduersary, should so much imbase himself, (hauing otherwise bin very wise and wel aduised, in all his actions) touching his bed-fellow, & hee that for his excellency and valor surpasseth humane capacity, should stoope so lowe as to take to wife her that issuing from a seruile race, hath only the name of a king for her father, for that the basenes of her blood, will alwaies cause her to shewe what are the vertues & noble qualities of hir ancestors: and you my Lord said she, are you so ignorant as not to know that mariage should not bee measured by any foolish opinion, of an outward beautie, but rather by vertues and antiquitie of race, which maketh the wife to be honored for her prudence, and neuer degenerating from the integritie of his ancestors: exterior beawty also is nothing where perfection of y^e^ mind doth not accomplish, & adorn that which is outwardly seen to be in the bodie, and is lost by an accident, & occurrence of small moment: as also such toyes haue deceiued many men, & drawing them like inticing baits, haue cast them headlong into the gulf of their ruine, dishonor, and vtter ouerthrow, it was I to whom this advantage belonged being a queen, & such a one, as for nobility may compare my selfe with the greatest princes in Europe, being nothing inferiour vnto any of them neither for antiquitie of blood, nobilitie of parents, nor abundance of riches,

& am not only a Queene, but such a one, as that receiuing whom I will for my companion in bed, can make him beare the title of a king, & with my body giue him possession of a great kingdome, & goodly prouince, think then my Lord how much I account of your alliance, who being accustomed with the sword to pursue such as durst imbolden themselues to win my love, it is to you only to whom I make a present both of my kisses, imbracings scepter, & crown: what man is he if he be not made of stone, would refuse so pretious a pawn as Hermetrude with y^e^ kingdome of Scotland? accept sweete king, accepte this Queene, who w^t^ so great loue & amitie, desireth your so great profit, & can giue you more contentment in one day then the princesse of England wold yeeld you pleasure during hir life, & although shee surpasse me in beawty, her bloud beeing base it is fitter for such a king as you are to chuse Hermetrude, less beautiful but noble & famous, rather then the English Lady with great beawtie, but issuing from an vnknown race, without any title of honor: now think if the Dane hearing such forcible resons & vnderstanding y^t^ by her which he half doubted as also moued w^t^ choller for the treason of his father in law, y^t^ purposely sent him thether to loose his life, & being welcomed, kist, and playd withal by this queen, yong, & reasonable faire, if he were not easie enough to be conuerted, & like to forget the affection of his first wife, w^t^ this to enioy the realme of Scotland, & so open the waie to become king of all greate Britain, y^t^ to conclude he marryed her & led her with him to the king of Englands, court which moued the king from that time forward much more to seek the meanes, to bereaue him of his life, & had surely done it, if his daughter, Hamlets other wife, more careful of him y^t^ had reiected her then of her fathers welfare, had not discovered the enterprise to Hamlet saying, I

know well my Lord, y^t^ the alurements & perswasions of a bold & altogether shameles woman, being more lasciuious then the chast imbracements of a lawful and modest wife, are of more force to intice and charm the sences of yong men: but for my part I cannot take this abuse, for satisfaction to leaue mee in this sorte, without all cause reason or precedent faulte once knowne in mee your loyall spouse, & take more pleasure in the aliance of her who one day will be the cause of your ruine, and ouerthrow, and although a iust cause of iealousye and reasonable motion of anger, dispence with mee at this time, to make no more account of you then you do of me, that am not worthy to be so scornfully reiected, yet matrimoniall charitie shal haue more force & vigour in my hart, then the disdaine which I haue iustly conceiued to see a concubine hold my place and a strange woman before my face inioy the pleasures of my husband. This iniury my Lord although great & offensiue which to reuenge diuers Ladies of great renown haue in times past sought & procured the death of their husbands, cannot so much restrain my good wil, but that [I] may not chuse but aduertise you what treason is deuised against you, beseeching you to stand vpon your guard for that my fathers onely seeking is to bereaue you of your life, which if it happen, I shall not long liue after you. Manie reasons induse me to loue and cherish you, and those of great consequence, but specially and aboue all the rest, I am and must bee carefull of you, when I feele your child stirring in my wombe; for which respecte, without so much forgetting yourself, you ought to make more account of me then of your concubine: whome I will loue because you loue her, contenting my selfe that your sonne hateth her, in regard to the wrong she doth to his mother: for it is impossible that any passion or trouble of the mind whatsoeuer can quench those

fierce passions of loue, that made me yours, neither that I shold forget your fauours past, when loyallie you sought the loue of the daughter of the king of England, neither is it in the power of that thiefe that hath stoln your heart, nor my fathers choller, to hinder me, from seeking to preserue you from the cruelty of your dissembling friend (as heertofore by counterfetting the madman, you preuented the practises, & treasons of your Uncle Fengon) the complot being determined to be executed vpon you & yours, without this aduertisement, the Dane had surely been slain, & the Scots y^t^ came with him for the King of England inuiting his son in Law to a banquet w^t^ the greatest curtesies y^t^ a friend can vse to him whom he loued as himself, had the means to intrap him, and cause him dance a pittiful galliard, in that sort; to celebrate the marriage betweene him and his new lady. But Hamlet went thither with armor vnder his clothes, & his men in like sort, by which means, he and his escaped with little hurt, and so after that hapned the battaile before spoken of, wherein the king of England losing his life, his countrie was the third time sacked by the barbarians of the ilands, & countrie of Denmark.

CHAPTER VIII.

How Hamblet being in Denmarke, was assailed by Wiglerus his vncle, and after betrayed by his last wife, called Hermetrude, and was slaine: after whose death she married his enemie, Wiglerus.

HAMLET having obtained the victory against the king of England, and slaine him, laden with great treasures and accompanied with his two wiues, set forward to saile into Denmarke, but by the way hee had intelli-

gence, that Wiglere his vncle, and sonne to Rodericke, hauing taken the royall treasure from his sister Geruth (mother to Hamblet) had also seazed vpon the kingdome: saying, that neither Horuendile nor any of his helde it but by permission, and that it was in him (to whom the property belonged) to giue the charge therof to whom he would. But Hamblet not desirous to have any quarrel with the sonne of him, from whom his Predecessors had receiued their greatnes and aduancement, gaue such and so rich presents to Wiglere, that he being contented withdrew himselfe out of the countrey & territories of Geruths sonne. But within certaine time after, Wiglere, desirous to keepe all the countrey in subiection, intyced by the conquest of Scanie, and Sialandie, and also that Hermetrude (the wife of Hamlet, whom he loued more than himselfe) had secret intelligence with him and had promised him marriage, so he would take her out of the handes of him that held her, sent to defie Hamlet, and proclaimed open warre against him. Hamlet like a good and wise prince, louing especially the welfare of his subiects, sought by all meanes to auoide that warre, but againe refusing it, he perceiued a great spot and blemish in his honor, and accepting the same, hee knewe it would bee the ende of his dayes: by the desire of preseruing his life on the one side, & his honor on the other side pricking him forward; but at the last remembring that neuer any danger whatsoeuer had once shaken his vertues and constancy, chose rather the necessitie of his ruine, then to loose the immortall fame that valiant and honourable men obtained in the warres; and there is as much difference betweene a life without honour and an honourable death, as glory & renowne is more excellent then dishonour and euill report.

Hermetrude betrayeth Hamlet her husband.

But the thing that spoyled this vertuous Prince, was the ouer great trust & confidence hee had in his

wife Hermetrude, and the vehement loue hee bare vnto her, not once repenting the wrong in that case done to his lawfull spouse, and for the which (paraduenture that misfortune had neuer hapned vnto him, and it would neuer haue bin thought, that she whom he loued aboue all things, would haue so villainously betrayed him), hee not once remembring his first wiues speeches, who prophesied vnto him, that the pleasures hee seemed to take in his other wife, would in the end be the cause of his ouerthrowe, as they had rauished him of the best part of his sences, & quenched in him the great prudence that made him admirable in all the countries in the ocean seas, and through all Germany, now the greatest grief, that this king (besotted on his wife) had, was the separation of her whom he adored, and, assuring himselfe of his ouerthrowe, was desirous, either that shee might beare him company at his death, or els to find her a husband that should loue her (he beeing dead) as well as euer hee did: but the disloyall queene, had already prouided her selfe of a marriage, to put her husband out of trouble and care for that: who perceiuing him to be sad for her sake, when shee should haue absented her selfe from him, she to blind him the more, and to incourage him to set forward to his owne destruction, promised to follow him whether soeuer he went, & to take the like fortune that befell to him, were it good or euil, and that so she would giue him cause to know, how much shee surpassed the English woman in her affection towardes him, saying, that woman is accursed that feareth to follow and accompany her husband to the death: so that to heare her speake, men would haue sayd that shee had beene the wife of Mithridates, or Zenobia queene of Palmira, shee made so greate a show of loue and constancy: But by the effect it was after easily perceiued, how vaine the promise of this vnconstant and wauering Prin-

cesse was: and howe vncomparable the life of this Scottish Queene was to the vigor of her chastitie, being a mayd before she was married. For that Hamlet had no sooner entred into the field, but she found meanes to see Wiglere, and the battel begun, wherein the miserable Danish Prince was slaine: but Hermetrude presently yeelded her self, with all her dead husbands treasons, into the hand of the Tyrant: who more then content with that metamorphosis so much desired, gaue order that presently the marriage (bought with the blood and treasor of the sonne of Horuendile) should bee celebrated. Hamlet slaine.

Thus you see, that there is no promise or determination of a woman, but that a very small discommoditie of Fortune mollifieth and altereth the same, and which time doeth not peruert; so that the misfortunes subject to a constant man shake and overthrowe the naturall slipperie loyaltie of the variable steppes of women, wholy without any[1] faithfull assurance of loue, or true vnfained constancy: for as a woman is readie to promise so is shee heauy and slowe to performe, and effect that which she hath promised, as she that is without end or limit in her desires, flattring her selfe in the diuersitie of her wanton delights, and taking pleasure in diuersitie and change of newe things, which as soone shee doth forget and growe weary off: and to conclude, such shee is in all her actions, she is rash, couetous, and vnthankefull, whatsoeuer good or seruice bee done vnto her. But nowe I perceiue I erre in my discourse, vomiting such things vnworthy of this sects, but the vices of Hermetrude haue made mee say more then I meant to speake, as also the Authour, from whence I take this Hystorie, hath almost made mee hold his course, I finde so great a sweetnesse and liuelinesse in this kinde of Argument: and the

[1] [Old copy reads, *and any.*]

rather because it seemeth so much the truer, considering the miserable successe of poore king Hamlet.

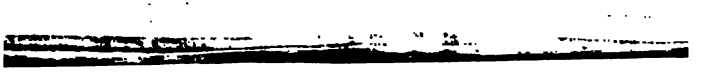
Such was the ende of Hamlet, sonne to Horuendile, Prince of Jutie: to whom if his Fortune had been equall with his inward and naturall giftes, I know not which of the auncient Grecians and Romans had beene able to haue compared with him for vertue and excellencie: but hard fortune following him in all his actions, and yet hee vanquishing the malice of his time, with the vigour of constancy, hath left vs a notable example of haughtie courage, worthy of a great Prince, arming himselfe with hope in things that were wholy without any colour or shewe thereof, and in all his honorable actions made himselfe worthy of perpetuall memorie, if one onely spotte had not blemished and darkened a good part of his prayses. For that the greatest victorie, that a man can obtain is to make himselfe victorious, and lord ouer his owne affections, and that restraineth the vnbridled desires of his concupiscence: for if a man be neuer so princely, valiant, and wise, if the desires and inticements of his flesh preuaile, and have the vpper hand, he will imbase his credite, and gasing after strange beauties become a foole, and (as it were) incensed, dote on the presence of women. This fault was in the great Hercules, Sampson, and the wisest man that euer liued vpon the earth following this traine, therein impaired his wit, and the most noble, wise, valiant and discreet personages of our time, following the same course haue left vs many notable examples of their worthy and notable vertues.

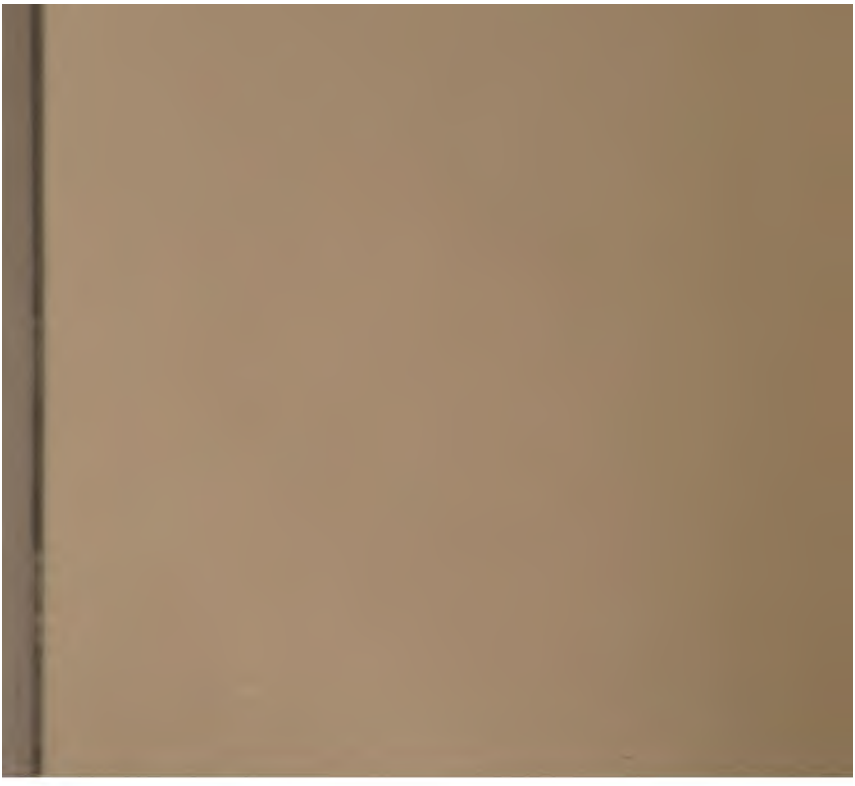
But I beseech you that shall reade this Hystorie, not to resemble the Spider, that feedeth of the corruption that shee findeth in the flowers and fruites that are in the Gardens, whereas the Bee gathereth her hony, out of the best and fayrest flower shee can

finde: for a man that is well brought vp should reade the liues of whoremongers, drunkards, incestuous, violent and bloody persons, not to follow their steps, and so to defile himselfe with such vncleannesse, but to shunne paliardize, abstain the superfluities and drunkennesse in banquets, and follow the modestie, courtesie, and continencie that recommendeth Hamlet, in this discourse, who while other made good cheare, continued sober, and where all men sought as much as they could, to gather together riches and treasure, hee simply accounting riches nothing comparable to honor, sought to gather a multitude of vertues, that might make him equall to those that by them were esteemed as Gods, hauing not as then receiued the lighte of the Gospell, that men might see among the Barbarians, and them that were farre from the knowledge of one onelye God, that nature was prouoked to follow that which is good and those forward to imbrace vertue for that there was neuer any nation how rude or barbarous soever that tooke not some pleasure to do that which seemed good, therby to win praise, and commendations, which wee haue said to be the reward of vertue, and good life, I delight to speak of these strange histories, and of people that were vnchristned, that the vertue of the rude people maie giue more splendor, to our nation who seeing them so compleat,[1] wise, prudent, and well aduised in their actions, might striue not only to follow (imitation being a small matter) but to surmount them as our religion surpasseth their superstition, and our age more purged subtill, and gallant, then the season wherin they liued and made their vertues knowne.

[1] [The last lines from "compleat" to the end taper after the manner of books of the time.]

FINIS.





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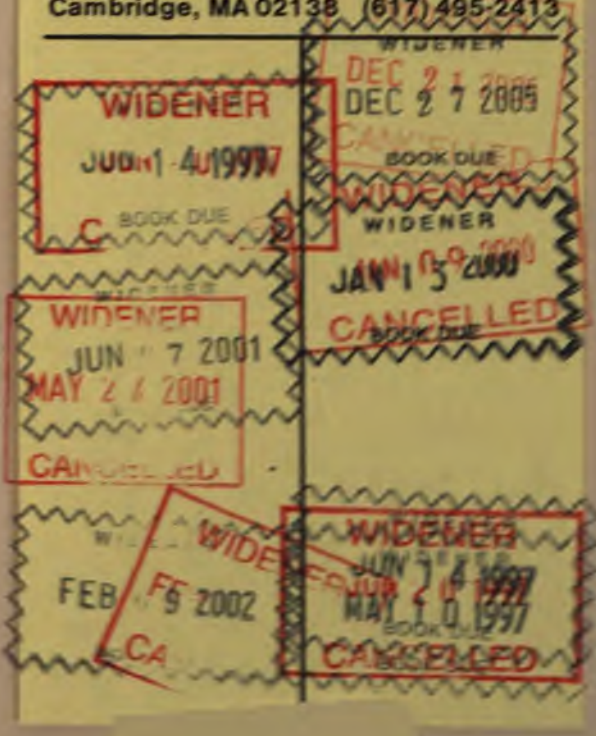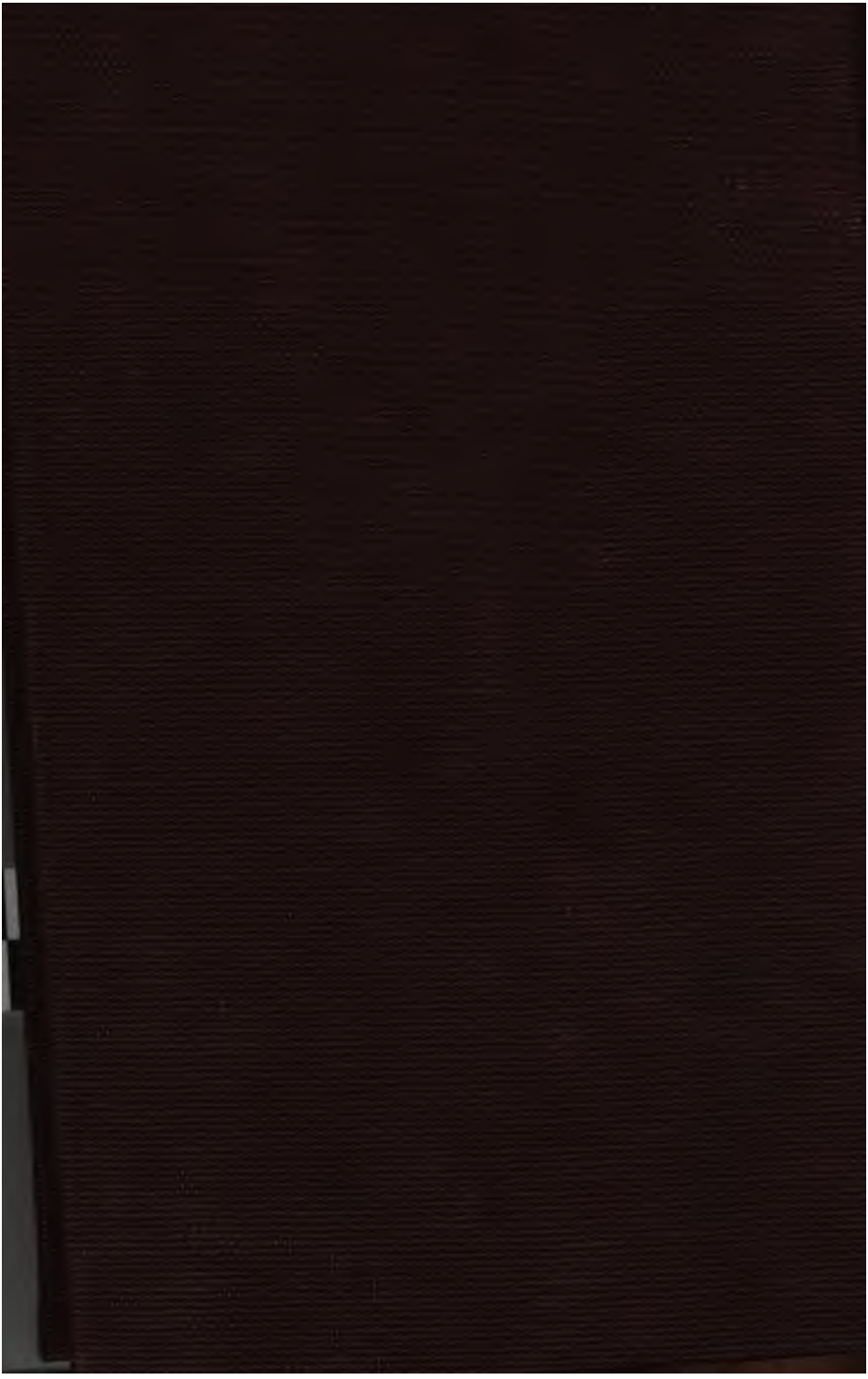
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